The CORNER HOUSE GIRLS UNDER CANVAS

GRACE BROOKS HILL

Mildred E. Vodra
Middleport
N. Y.

Before either Tess or Dot thought to cry out for help, they were out of sight of the camp.

(Page 149) *Frontispiece*

THE CORNER HOUSE GIRLS UNDER CANVAS

HOW THEY REACHED PLEASANT COVE AND WHAT HAPPENED AFTERWARD

BY

GRACE BROOKS HILL

AUTHOR OF "THE CORNER HOUSE GIRLS," "THE CORNER HOUSE GIRLS AT SCHOOL," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY

R. EMMETT OWEN

NEW YORK

BARSE & HOPKINS

PUBLISHERS

BOOKS FOR GIRLS

By Grace Brooks Hill

The Corner House Girls Series

12mo. Cloth. Illustrated. Price per volume, 50 cents, net.

THE CORNER HOUSE GIRLS
THE CORNER HOUSE GIRLS AT SCHOOL
THE CORNER HOUSE GIRLS UNDER CANVAS

BARSE & HOPKINS
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

Copyright, 1915,
by
Barse & Hopkins

The Corner House Girls Under Canvas

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	Tom Jonah	9
II	Something to Look Forward To	19
III	The Dance at Carrie Poole's	32
IV	The Mystery of June Wildwood	50
V	Off for the Seaside	58
VI	On the Train	66
VII	Something Ahead	74
VIII	The Gypsy Camp	82
IX	The Spoondrift Bungalow	90
X	Some Excitement	98
XI	The Little Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe	105
XII	A Picnic with Agamemnon	115
XIII	The Night of the Big Wind	122
XIV	An Important Arrival	133
XV	Two Girls in a Boat—to Say Nothing of the Dog!	143
XVI	The Gypsies Again	151
XVII	On Wild Goose Island	160
XVIII	The Search	169
XIX	A Startling Meeting	179

Contents

CHAPTER		PAGE
XX	The Frankfurter Man	188
XXI	Mrs. Bobster's Mysterious Friend	198
XXII	The Yarn of the "Spanking Sal"	206
XXIII	The Shadow	215
XXIV	Brought to Book	227
XXV	The End of the Outing	242

ILLUSTRATIONS

PAGE

Before either Tess or Dot thought to cry out for help, they were out of sight of the camp . . *Frontispiece*

A kicking figure was sprawled on the roof, clinging with both hands to the ridge of it 21

Ruth actually went back, groping through the gathering smoke, for the doll. With it she scrambled out upon the shingles 104

The dog was perplexed. He started after the man; he started back for the girls. He whined and he barked 220

THE CORNER HOUSE GIRLS UNDER CANVAS

CHAPTER I

TOM JONAH

"Come here, Tess! Come quick and look at this poor dog. He's just drip-ping-*wet!*"

Dot Kenway stood at a sitting-room window of the old Corner House, looking out upon Willow Street. It was a dripping day, and anything or anybody that remained out-of-doors and exposed to the downpour for half an hour, was sure to be saturated.

Nothing wetter or more miserable looking than the dog in question had come within the range of the vision of the two younger Corner House girls that Saturday morning.

Tess, who was older than Dot, came running. Anything as frightfully despondent and hopeless looking as that dog was bound to touch the tender heart of Tess Kenway.

"Let's—let's take him to the porch and feed him, Dot," she cried.

"Will Ruthie let us?" asked Dot.

"Of course. She's gone for her music lesson and won't know, anyway," declared Tess, recklessly.

"But maybe Mrs. MacCall won't like it?"

"She's upstairs and won't know, either. Besides," Tess said, bolstering up her own desire, "she says she hasn't ever sent anybody away hungry from her door; and that poor dog looks just as hungry as any tramp that ever came to the old Corner House."

The girls ran out of the sitting-room into the huge front hall which, in itself, was almost big enough for a ballroom. It was finished in dark, dark oak; there was a huge front door—like the door of a castle; the furniture was walnut, upholstered in haircloth, worn shiny by more than three generations of use; and out of the middle of the hall a great stairway arose, dividing when half-way up into two sections, while a sort of gallery was built all around the hall at the second floor, out of which the doors of the principal chambers opened.

There was a third story above, and above that a huge garret—often the playroom of the Corner House girls on such days as this. In the rear were two wings built on to the house, each three stories in height. The house had its "long" side to Willow Street, and only a narrow grass plot and brick walk separated the sitting-room windows from the boundary fence.

It faced Main Street, at its head, where the

Parade Ground began. The dripping trees on the Parade were now in full leaf and the lush grass beneath them was green. The lawns of the old Corner House needed the mower, too; and at the back Uncle Rufus—the general factotum of the establishment—had laid out a wonderful kitchen garden which already had yielded radishes and tender onions and salad, and promised green peas to accompany the spring lamb to the table on the approaching Fourth.

Tess and Dot Kenway crossed the big hall of the Corner House, and went on through the dining-room with its big table, huge, heavily carved sideboard and comfortably armed chairs, through the butler's pantry into the kitchen. As Tess had said, Mrs. MacCall, their good-natured and lovable housekeeper, was not in sight. Nobody delayed them, and they stepped out upon the half-screened porch at the back. The woodshed joined it at the far end. The steps faced Willow Street.

On the patch of drying-green a goat was tethered, lying down in the rain, reflectively chewing a cud. He bleated when he saw the girls, but did not offer to rise; the rain did not disturb him in the least.

"Billy Bumps likes the rain," Dot said, thoughtfully.

The dog outside the gate did not seem to be enjoying himself. He had dropped down upon the narrow strip of sward between the flagged

walk and the curbing; his sides heaved as though he had run a long way, and his pink tongue lolled out of his mouth and dripped.

"My!" Dot murmured, as she saw this, "the rain's soaked right through the poor doggy—hasn't it? And it's just dripping out of him!"

Tess, more practical, if no more earnest in her desire to relieve the dog's apparent misery, ran down to the gate through the falling rain and called to him:

"Poor, poor doggie! Come in!"

She opened the gate temptingly, but the strange dog merely wagged his tail and looked at her out of his beautiful brown eyes. He was a Newfoundland dog, with a cross of some breed that gave him patches of deep brown in his coat and very fine, long, silky hair that curled up at the ends. He was strongly built and had a good muzzle which was powdered with the gray hairs of age.

"Come here, old fellow," urged Tess. "*Do* come in!"

She snapped her fingers and held the gate more invitingly open. He staggered to his feet and limped toward her. He did not crouch and slink along as a dog does that has been beaten; but he eyed her doubtfully as though not sure, after all, of this reception.

He was muddied to his flanks, his coat was matted with green burrs, and there was a piece of frayed rope knotted about his neck. The dog

followed Tess doubtfully to the porch. Billy Bumps climbed to his feet and shook his head threateningly, stamping his feet; but the strange dog was too exhausted to pay the goat any attention.

The visitor at first refused to mount the steps, but he looked up at Dot and wagged his tail in greeting.

"Oh, Tess!" cried the smallest girl. "He thinks he knows me. Do you suppose we have ever seen him before?"

"I don't believe so," said Tess, bustling into the woodshed and out again with a pan of broken meat that had been put aside for Sandyface and her children. "I know I should remember him if I had ever seen him before. Come, old fellow! Good doggie! Come up and eat."

She put the pan down on the porch and stood back from it. The brown eyes of the dog glowed more brightly. He hesitatingly hobbled up the steps.

A single sniff of the tidbits in the pan, and the dog fell to wolfishly, not stopping to chew at all, but fairly jerking the meat into his throat with savage snaps.

"Oh, don't gobble so!" gasped Dot. "It—it's bad for your indigestions—and isn't polite, anyway."

"Guess you wouldn't be polite if you were as hungry as he is," Tess observed.

The dog was so tired that he lay right down,

after a moment, and ate with his nose in the pan. Dot ventured to pat his wet coat and he thumped his tail softly on the boards, but did not stop eating.

At this juncture Uncle Rufus came shuffling up the path from the hen-coop. Uncle Rufus was a tall, stoop-shouldered, pleasantly brown negro, with a very bald crown around which was a narrow growth of tight, grizzled "wool." He had a smiling face, and if the whites of his eyes were turning amber hued with age he was still "purty pert"—to use his own expression—save when the rheumatism laid him low.

"Whar' yo' chillen done git dat dawg?" he wanted to know, in astonishment.

"Oh, Uncle Rufus!" cried Dot. "He came along looking *so* wet——"

"And he was *so* tired and hungry," added Tess.

"I done spec' yo' chillen would take in er wild taggar, ef one come erlong lookin' sort o' meachin'," grumbled the colored man.

"But he's so good!" said Tess. "See!" and she put her hand upon the handsome head of the bedraggled beast.

"He jes' er tramp dawg," said Uncle Rufus, doubtfully.

"He's only tired and dirty," said Tess, earnestly. "I don't believe he wants to be a tramp. He doesn't look at all like the tramps Mrs. MacCall feeds at the back door here."

"Nor like those horrid Gypsies that came to

the house the other day," added Dot eagerly. "I was afraid of them."

"Well, it suah ain't b'long 'round yere—dat dawg," muttered Uncle Rufus. "It done run erway f'om somewhar' an' hit trabbel far—ya-as'm!"

He pulled the ears of the big dog himself, in a kindly fashion, and the dog pounded the porch harder with his tail and rolled a trusting eye up at the little group. Evidently the tramp dog was convinced that this would be a good place to remain in, and "rest up."

A pretty girl of twelve or thirteen, with flower-like face, plump, and her blue eyes dancing and laughing in spite of her, ran in at the side gate. She had a covered basket of groceries on her arm, and was swathed in a raincoat with a close hood about her face.

"Agnes!" screamed Dot. "See what we've got! Just the nicest, friendfulnest dog——"

"Mercy, Dot! More animals?" was the older sister's first comment.

"But he's such a *nice* dog," wailed Dot.

"And so hungry and wet," added Tess.

"What fine eyes he has!" exclaimed Agnes, stooping down to pat the noble head. Instantly the dog's pink tongue sought her hand and—Agnes was won!

"He's splendid! he's a fine old fellow!" she cried. "Of course we'll keep him, Dot."

"If Ruthie says so," added Tess, with a loyalty

to the oldest Corner House girl born of the fact that Ruth had mothered the brood of three younger sisters since their real mother had died three years previous.

"I dunno wot yo' chillen want er dawg for," complained Uncle Rufus.

"To keep chicken thieves away," said Agnes, promptly, laughing roguishly at the grumbling black man.

"Oh!" cried Tess. "You said yourself, Uncle Rufus, that those Gypsies that stopped here might be looking at Ruth's chickens."

"Well, I done guess dat tramp dawg knows when he's well off," said the old man, chuckling suddenly. "He's layin' down lak' he's fixin' tuh stay—ya-as'm!"

The dog had crept to the most sheltered corner of the porch and curled up on an old rag mat Mrs. MacCall had left there for the cats.

"He ought to have that dirty old rope taken off," said Agnes.

Uncle Rufus drew out his clasp knife and opened the blade. He approached the weary dog and knelt down to remove the rope.

"Glo-*ree!*" he exclaimed, suddenly. "He done got er collar on him."

It was hidden in the thick hair about the dog's neck. The three girls crowded close to see, Uncle Rufus unbuckled it and handed the leather strap to Agnes.

"See if there is any name and address on it,

Aggie!" gasped Tess. "Oh! I hope not. Then, it we don't know where he came from, he's ours for keeps."

There was a small brass plate; but no name, address, or license number was engraved upon it. Instead, in clear script, it was marked:

"THIS IS TOM JONAH. HE IS A GENTLEMAN."

"There!" cried Dot, as though this settled the controversy. "What did I tell you? He *can't* be any tramp dog. He's a gentleman."

"'Tom Jonah,'" murmured Agnes. "What a funny name!"

When Ruth came home the younger girls bore her off at once to see Tom Jonah sleeping comfortably on the porch. The old dog raised his grizzled muzzle, wagged his tail, and beamed at her out of his soft brown eyes.

"The dear love!" cried Tess, clasping her hands. "Isn't he beautiful, Ruthie?"

"Beautifully dirty," said Ruth, doubtfully.

"Oh, but Uncle Rufus says he will wash him to-morrow. He's got some insect—insecty-suicide soap like he puts on the henroosts——"

"Insecticide, Dot," admonished Tess. "I wish you wouldn't try to say words that you *can't* say."

Dot pouted. But Ruth patted her head and said, soothingly:

"Never mind, honey. We'll let the poor dog stay till he rests up, anyway. He looks like a kind creature."

But she, as well as the adults in the old Corner House, did not expect to see Tom Jonah the next morning when they awoke. He was allowed to remain on the porch, and despite the objections of Sandyface, the mother cat, and the army of younger felines growing up about her, Tom Jonah was given a bountiful supper by Mrs. MacCall herself.

Dot and Tess ran to peep at the dog just before going to bed that night. He blinked at them in the lampshine from the open door, and thumped the porch flooring with his tail.

It was past midnight before anything more was heard of Tom Jonah. Then the whole house was aroused—not to say the neighborhood. There was a savage salvo of barks from the porch, and down the steps scrambled Tom Jonah. They heard him go roaring down the yard.

Then there arose a great confusion at the hen house—a squawking of frightened hens, the loud "cut, cut, ca-da-cut!" of the rooster, mingling with which was the voice of at least one human being and the savage baying of Tom Jonah.

CHAPTER II

SOMETHING TO LOOK FORWARD TO

Uncle Rufus was too old and too stiff to get out of bed and down from his third-story room in the old Corner House, to be of any assistance at this midnight incident. But the girls were awakened the moment Tom Jonah began barking.

"It's a hen thief!" squealed Tess, leaping out of her own warm nest.

"I hope that dog bites him!" cried Agnes, savagely, from the other room.

She ran to the window. It was a starlit, but foggy night. She could see only vaguely the objects out of doors.

Ruth was scrambling into a skirt and dressing sacque; she thrust her feet into shoes, too, and started downstairs. Mrs. MacCall's window went up with a bang, and the girls heard the housekeeper exclaim:

"Shoo! shoo! Get out of there!"

Whoever it was that had roused Tom Jonah, the person was evidently unable to "get out of there." The dog's threatening growls did not cease, and the man's voice which had first been heard when the trouble started, was protesting.

Agnes followed her older sister downstairs. Of course, Aunt Sarah Maltby, who slept in one of the grand front rooms in the main part of the house, did not even hear all the disturbance. And there were not any houses really near the Stower Homestead, which Milton people knew by the name of "the old Corner House."

Therefore, the sounds of conflict at the Kenway hennery were not likely to arouse many people. But when Ruth and Agnes reached out-of-doors, the younger girl remembered one person who might hear and be of assistance.

"Let's call Neale O'Neil!" she cried to Ruth. "He'll help us."

"We'd better call a policeman," said Ruth, running down the brick path.

"Huh! you wouldn't find a policeman in Milton at this hour of the night, if you searched for a week of Sundays," was the younger girl's ambiguous statement. Then she raised her voice and shouted: "Neale! Neale O'Neil! Help!"

Meantime the dog continued his threatening bayings. The fowls fluttered and squawked. Billy Bumps began to blat and butt the partition in his pen. Whoever had ventured into the hennery had gotten into hot quarters and no mistake!

Ruth stopped suddenly in the path and clutched at Agnes' arm. Agnes was as lightly dressed as herself; but it was a warm June night and there was no danger of their getting cold.

A kicking figure was sprawled on the roof, clinging with both hands to the ridge of it. Page 21

"Suppose the dog does not remember us?" the older girl gasped in Agnes' ear. "Maybe—maybe he'll tear us to pieces. How savage he sounds!"

Agnes was frightened; but she had pluck, too. "Come on, Ruth!" she said. "He is only mad at the thief."

"If it *is* a thief," quavered Ruth. "I—I am afraid to go on, Aggie."

At that moment the sound of little feet pattering behind them made both girls turn. There were Dot and Tess, both barefooted, and Dot with merely a doubled-up comforter snatched from her bed, wrapped over her night clothes.

"Mercy me, children!" gasped Ruth. "What are you doing here?"

"Oh, we mustn't let Tom Jonah *bite* that man," Tess declared, and kept right on running toward the henhouse.

"If that dog bites——" screamed Ruth, and ran after her smaller sister.

There was the big dog leaping savagely toward the low eaves of the hennery. A kicking figure was sprawled on the roof, clinging with both hands to the ridge of it. The girls obtained a glimpse of a dark face, with flashing teeth, and big gold rings in the marauder's ears.

"Tak' dog away! Tak' dog away!" the man said, in a strangled voice.

"He's one of those Gypsies," whispered Agnes, in an awed voice.

A tribe of the nomads in question had passed through Milton but a day or two before, and the girls had been frightened by the appearance of the men of the tribe who had called at the old Corner House.

Now, whether this marauder belonged to the same people or not, Ruth saw that he looked like a Gypsy. For another reason, too, her mind was relieved at once; Tom Jonah was only savage toward the man on the roof.

When Tess ran right up to the leaping dog, he stopped barking, and wagged his tail, as though satisfied that he had done his duty in drawing the family to the scene. But he still kept his eyes on the man, and occasionally uttered a growl deep in his throat.

"What are you doing up there?" Ruth demanded of the man.

"Tak' away dog!" he whined.

"No. I think I will let the dog hold you till a policeman comes. You were trying to rob our henroost."

"Oh, no, Missee! You wrong. No do that," stammered the man.

"What were you doing here, then?"

Before the fellow could manufacture any plausible tale, a shout came from beyond the back fence, and somebody was heard to scramble into the Corner House yard.

"What's the matter, girls?" demanded Neale O'Neil's cheerful voice.

"Oh, come here, Neale!" cried Agnes. "Tom Jonah's caught a Gypsy."

"Tom *Who?*" demanded the tall, pleasant-faced boy of fifteen, who immediately approached the henhouse.

"Tom Jonah," announced Tess. "He's just the *nicest* dog!"

The boy saw the group more clearly then. He looked from the savagely growling animal to the man sprawling on the roof, and burst out laughing.

"Yes! I guess that fellow up there feels that the dog is very 'nice.' Where did you get the dog, and where did *he* get his name?"

"We'll tell you all about that later, Neale," said Ruth, more gravely. "At least, we'll tell you all we know about the dear old dog. Isn't he a splendid fellow to catch this man at my hens?"

"And the fellow had some in this bag!" exclaimed Neale, finding a bag of flopping poultry at the corner of the hen-run.

"Tak' away dog!" begged the man on the roof again.

"That's all he's afraid of," said Agnes. "I bet he has a knife. Isn't he a wicked looking fellow?"

"Regular brigand," agreed Neale. "What we going to do with him?"

"Give him to a policeman," suggested Agnes.

"Do you suppose the policeman would *want*

him?" chuckled Neale. "To awaken a Milton officer at this hour of the night would be almost sacrilege, wouldn't it?"

"What *shall* we do?" demanded Agnes.

Ruth had been thinking more sensibly for a few moments. Now she spoke up decisively:

"The man did not manage to do any harm. Put the poultry back in the house, Neale. If he ever comes again he will know what to expect. He thought we had no dog; but he sees we have —and a savage one. Let him go."

"Had we better do that, sister?" whispered Agnes. "Oughtn't he to be punished?"

"I expect so," Ruth said, grimly. "But for once I am going to shirk my duty. We'll take away the dog and let him go."

"Who'll take him away?" demanded Agnes, suddenly.

Neale had taken the sack in which the fowl struggled, to the door of the henhouse, opened it, and dumped the fowl out. Tom Jonah evidently recognized him for a friend, for he wagged his tail, but still kept his eye on the man upon the roof.

"I declare!" said Ruth. "I hadn't thought. Whom will he mind?"

"Come here, Tom Jonah!" said Neale, snapping his fingers.

Tom Jonah still wagged his tail, but he remained ready to receive the Gypsy (if such the fellow was) in his jaws, if he descended.

"Come away, Tom!" exclaimed Agnes, confidently. "Come on back to the house."

The man on the roof moved and Tom Jonah stiffened. He refused to budge.

"Guess you'll have to call a cop after all," said Neale, doubtfully.

"Here, sir!" commanded Ruth. "Come away. You have done enough——"

But the dog did not think so. He held his place and growled.

"I guess you're bound to stay up there, till daylight—or a policeman—doth appear, my friend," called up Neale to the besieged.

"Tak' away dog!" begged the frightened fellow.

"Why, Tom Jonah!" exclaimed Tess, walking up to the big dog and putting a hand on his collar. "You must come away when you are spoken to. You've caught the bad man, and that's enough."

Tom Jonah turned and licked her hand. Then he moved a few steps away with her and looked back.

"Come on with me, Tom Jonah," commanded the little girl, firmly. "Let the bad man go."

"What do you know about *that?*" demanded Neale.

The next minute the fellow had scrambled up the roof, caught the low hanging limb of a shade tree that stood near the fence, and swinging himself like a cat into the tree, he got out on another

branch that overhung the sidewalk, dropped, and ran.

Tom Jonah sprang to the fence with a savage bay; but the man only went the faster. The incident was closed in a minute, and the little party of half-dressed young folk went back to their beds, while the strange dog curled up on his mat in the corner of the porch again and slept the sleep of the just till morning.

And now that the excitement is over, let us find out a little something about the Corner House girls, their friends, their condition in life, and certain interesting facts regarding them.

When Mr. Howbridge, the lawyer from Milton and Uncle Peter Stower's man of affairs and the administrator of his estate, came to the little tenement on Essex Street, Bloomingsburg, where the four orphaned Kenway girls had lived for some years with Aunt Sarah Maltby, he first met Tess and Dot returning from the drugstore with Aunt Sarah's weekly supply of peppermint drops.

Aunt Sarah had been a burden on the Kenways for many years. The girls had only their father's pension to get along on. Aunt Sarah claimed that when Uncle Peter died, his great estate would naturally fall to her, and then she would return all the benefits she had received from the Kenway family.

But the lawyer knew that queer old Uncle Peter Stower had made a will leaving practically all his property to the four girls in trust, and to

Aunt Sarah only a small legacy. But this will had been hidden somewhere by the old man before his recent death and had not yet been found.

There seemed to be no other claimants to the Stower Estate, however, and the court allowed Mr. Howbridge to take the Kenway girls and Aunt Sarah to Milton and establish them in the Stower Homestead, known far and wide as the old Corner House.

Here, during the year that had passed, many interesting and exciting things had happened to Ruth and Agnes and Tess and Dot.

Ruth was the head of the family, and the lawyer greatly admired her good sense and ability. She was not a strikingly pretty girl, for she had "stringy" black hair and little color; but her eyes were big and brown, and those eyes, and her mouth, laughed suddenly at you and gave expression to her whole face. She was now completing her seventeenth year.

Agnes was thirteen, a jolly, roly-poly girl, who was fond of jokes, a bit of a tomboy, up to all sorts of pranks—who laughed easily and cried stormily—had "lots of molasses colored hair" as she said herself, and was the possessor of a pair of blue eyes that could stare a rude boy out of countenance, but who *would* spoil the effect of this the next instant by giggling; a girl who had a soulmate among her girl friends all of the time, but not frequently did one last for long in the catalog of her "best friends."

Nobody remembered that Tess had been named Theresa. She was a wise little ten-year-old who possessed some of Ruth's dignity and some of Agnes' prettiness, and the most tender heart in the world, which made her naturally tactful. She was quick at her books and very courageous.

Dorothy, or Dot, was the baby and pet of the family. She was a little brunette fairy; and if she was not very wise as yet, she was faithful and lovable, and not one of "the Corner House girls," as the Kenways were soon called by Milton people, was more beloved than Dot.

The girls' best boy friend lived with the old cobbler, Mr. Con Murphy, on the rear street, and in a little house the yard of which adjoined the larger grounds of the old Corner House. We have seen how quickly Neale O'Neil came to the assistance of the Kenway girls when they were in trouble.

Neale had been brought up among circus people, his mother having traveled all her life with Twomley & Sorber's Herculean Circus and Menagerie. The boy's desire for an education and to win a better place in the world for himself, had caused him to run away from his uncle, Mr. Sorber, and support himself in Milton while he attended school.

The Corner House girls had befriended Neale and when his uncle finally searched him out and found the boy, it was they who influenced the man against taking Neale away. Neale had

proved himself an excellent scholar and had made friends in Milton; now he was about to graduate with Agnes from the highest grammar grade to high school.

The particulars of all these happenings have been related in the first two volumes of the series, entitled respectively, "The Corner House Girls" and "The Corner House Girls at School."

When Agnes woke up in the morning following the unsuccessful raid of the Gypsy man on the hennery, she had something of wonderful importance to tell Ruth. She had seen her "particular friend," Trix Severn, on the street Saturday afternoon and Trix had told her something.

"You've heard the girls talking about Pleasant Cove, Ruthie?" said Agnes, earnestly. "You know Mr. Terrence Severn owns one of the big hotels there?"

"Of course. Trix talks enough about it," said the older Kenway girl.

"Oh! you don't like Trix——"

"I'm not exceedingly fond of her. And there was a time when you thought her your very deadliest enemy," laughed Ruth.

"Well! Trix has changed," declared the unsuspicious Agnes, "and she's proposed the very nicest thing, Ruth. She says her mother and father will let her bring all four of us to the Cove for the first fortnight after graduation. The hotel will not be full then, and we will be Trix's guests. And we'll have loads of fun."

"I—don't—know——" began Ruth, but Agnes broke in warmly:

"Now, don't you say 'No,' Ruthie Kenway! Don't you say 'No!' I've just made up my mind to go to Pleasant Cove——"

"No need of flying off, Ag," said Ruth, in the cool tone that usually brought Agnes "down to earth again." "We have talked of going there for a part of the summer. A change to salt air will be beneficial for us all—so Dr. Forsythe says. I have talked to Mr. Howbridge, and he says 'Yes.'"

"Well, then!"

"But I doubt the advisability of accepting Trix Severn's invitation."

"Now, isn't that mean——"

"Hold your horses," again advised Ruth. "We will go, anyway. If all is well we will stay at the hotel a while. Pearl Harrod's uncle owns a bungalow there, too; *she* has asked me to come there for a while, and bring you all."

"Well! isn't that nice?" agreed Agnes. "Then we can stay twice as long."

"Whether it will be right for us to accept the hospitality offered us when we have no means of returning it——"

"Oh, dear me, Ruth! don't be a fuss-cat."

"There is a big tent colony there—quite removed from the hotel," suggested Ruth. "Many of our friends and their folks are going *there.*

Neale O'Neil is going with a party of the boys for at least two weeks."

"Say! we'll have scrumptious times," cried Agnes, with sparkling eyes. Her anticipation of every joy in life added immensely to the joy itself.

"Yes—if we go," said Ruth, slowly. But it was something for the others to look forward to with much pleasure.

CHAPTER III

THE DANCE AT CARRIE POOLE'S

Tess and Dot Kenway had something of particular interest to hold their attention, too, the minute they awoke on this Sunday morning. Dot voiced the matter first when she asked:

"Do you suppose that dear Tom Jonah is here yet, Tess?"

"Oh, I hope so!" cried the older girl.

"Let's run see," suggested Dot, and nothing loth Tess slipped into her bathrobe and slippers, too, and the two girls pattered downstairs. Their baths, always overseen by Ruth, were neglected. They must see, they thought, if the good old dog was on the porch.

Nobody was astir downstairs; Mrs. MacCall had not yet left her room, and on Sunday mornings even Uncle Rufus allowed himself an extra hour in bed. There was the delicious smell of warm baked beans left over night in the range oven; the big, steaming pot would be set upon the table at breakfast, flanked with golden-brown muffins on one side and the sliced "loaf," or brownbread, on the other.

Sandyface came yawning from her basket be-

hind the stove when Tess and Dot entered the kitchen. She had four little black and white blind babies in that basket which she had found in a barrel in the woodshed only a few days before.

Mrs. MacCall said she did not know what was to be done with the four kittens. Sandyface's original family was quite grown up, and if these four were allowed to live, too, that would make nine cats around the old Corner House.

"And the goodness knows!" exclaimed the housekeeper, "that's a whole lot more than any family has a business to keep. We're overrun with cats."

Tess unlocked the door and she and Dot went out on the porch, Sandyface following. There was no sign of the big dog.

"Tom Jonah's gone!" sighed Dot, quaveringly.

"I wouldn't have thought it—when we treated him so nicely," said Tess.

Sandyface sniffed suspiciously at the old mat on which the dog had lain. Then she looked all about before venturing off the porch.

The sunshine and quiet of a perfect Sunday morning lay all about the old Corner House. Robins sought their very souls for music to tell how happy they were, in the tops of the cherry trees. Catbirds had not yet lost their love songs of the spring; though occasionally one scolded harshly when a roaming cat came too near the hidden nest.

Wrens hopped about the path, and even upon the porch steps, secure in their knowledge that they were too quick for Sandyface to reach, and with unbounded faith in human beings. An oriole burst into melody, swinging in the great snowball bush near the Willow Street fence.

There was a moist, warm smell from the garden; the old rooster crowed raucously; Billy Bumps bleated a wistful "Good-morning" from his pen. Then came a scramble of padded feet, and Sandyface went up the nearest tree like a flash of lightning.

"Here is Tom Jonah!" cried Tess, with delight.

From around the corner of the woodshed appeared the big, shaggy dog. He cocked one ear and actually smiled when he saw the cat go up the tree. But he trotted right up on the porch to meet the delighted girls.

His brown eyes were deep pools where golden sparks played. The mud had been mostly shaken off his flanks and paws. He was rested, and he acted as though he were sure of his position here at the old Corner House.

"Good old fellow!" cried Tess, putting out a hand to pat him.

At once Tom Jonah put up his right paw to shake hands. He repeated the feat with Dot the next moment, to the delight of both girls.

"Oh!" gasped Dot, "he's a trick dog."

"He's just what his collar says; he's a gentle-

man," sighed Tess, happily. "Oh! I hope his folks won't ever come after him."

Ruth had to come down for Tess and Dot or they would not have been bathed and dressed in time for breakfast. The smaller girls were very much taken with Tom Jonah.

They found that he had more accomplishments than "shaking hands." When Agnes came down and heard about his first manifestation of education, she tried him at other "stunts."

He sat up at the word of command. He would hold a bit of meat, or a sweet cracker, on his nose any length of time you might name, and never offer to eat it until you said, "Now, sir!" or something of the kind. Then Tom Jonah would jerk the tidbit into the air and catch it in his jaws as it came down.

And those jaws! Powerful indeed, despite some of the teeth having been broken and discolored by age. For Tom Jonah was no puppy. Uncle Rufus declared him to be at least twelve years old, and perhaps more than that.

But he had the physique of a lion—a great, broad chest, and muscles in his shoulders that slipped under the skin when he was in action like a tiger's. Now that he was somewhat rested from the long journey he had evidently taken, he seemed a very powerful, healthy dog.

"And he would have eaten that tramp up, if he'd gotten hold of him," Agnes declared, as they gathered at the breakfast table.

"Oh, no, Aggie; I don't think Tom Jonah would really have *bitten* that Gypsy man," Tess hastened to say. "But he might have grabbed his coat and held on."

"With those jaws—I guess he would have held on," sighed Agnes.

"Anyway," said Dot, "he saved Ruthie's hens. Didn't he, Ruthie?"

"I'll gladly pay his license fee if he wants to stay with us," said Ruth, gaily.

The cornmeal muffins chanced to be a little over-baked that morning; at least, one panful was. Dot did not like "crusts"; she had been known to hide very hard ones under the edge of her plate.

She played with one of these muffin crusts more than she ate it, and Aunt Sarah Maltby (who was a very grim lady indeed with penetrating eyes and a habit of seldom speaking) had an accusing eye upon the little girl.

"Dorothy," she said, suddenly, "you will see the time, I have no doubt, when you will be hungry for that crust. You had better eat it now like a nice girl."

"Aunt Sarah, I really do not want it," said Dot, gravely. "And—and if I don't, do you think I shall really some day be hungry for just *this* pertic'lar crust?"

"You will. I expect nothing less," snapped Aunt Sarah. "The Kenways was allus spend-

thrifts. Why! when I was your age, Dorothy, I was glad to get dry bread to eat!"

Dot looked at her with serious interest. "You must have been awfully poor, Aunt Sarah," she said, sympathetically. "You have a much better time living with us, don't you?"

Ruth shook her head admonishingly at the smallest girl; but for once Aunt Sarah was rather nonplussed, and nobody heard her speak again before she went off to church.

Neale came over later, dressed for Sunday school, and he was as much interested in the new boarder at the Corner House as the girls themselves.

"If he belongs anywhere around Milton, somebody will surely know about him," said the boy. "I'll make inquiries. Wherever he comes from, he must be well known in that locality."

"Why so?" demanded Agnes.

"Because of what it says on his collar," laughed Neale O'Neil.

"Because of what it *doesn't* say, I guess," explained Ruth, seeing her sister's puzzled face. "There is no name of owner, or license number. Do you see?"

"It—it would be an insult to license a dog like Tom Jonah," sputtered Tess. "Just—just like a tag on an automobile!"

"Yo' right, honey," chuckled Uncle Rufus. "He done seem like folkses—don' he? I'se gwine

tuh give him a reg'lar barf an' cure up dem sore feetses ob his. He'll be anudder dawg—sho' will!"

The old man took Tom Jonah to the grass plot near the garden hydrant, and soaped him well—with the "insect-suicide" soap Dot had talked about—and afterward washed him down with the hose. Tom Jonah stood for it all; he had evidently been used to having his toilet attended to.

When the girls came home from Sunday school, they found him lying on the porch, all warm and dried and his hair "fluffy." They had asked everybody they met—almost—about Tom Jonah; but not a soul knew anything regarding him.

"He's going to be ours for keeps! He's going to be ours for keeps!" sang Tess, with delight.

Sandyface's earlier family—Spotty, Almira, Bungle and Popocatepetl—had taken a good look at the big dog, and then backed away with swelling tails and muffled objections. But the old cat had to attend to the four little blind mites behind the kitchen range, so she had grown familiar enough with Tom Jonah to pass him on her way to and from the kitchen door.

He was too much of a gentleman, as his collar proclaimed, to pay her the least attention save for a friendly wag of his bushy tail. To the four half-grown cats he gave little heed. But Tess and Dot thought that he ought to become acquainted with the un-named kittens in the basket immediately.

"If they get used to him, you know," said Tess, "they'll all live together just like a 'happy family.' "

"Like *us?*" suggested Dot, who did not quite understand the reference, having forgotten the particular cage thus labeled in the circus they had seen the previous summer.

"Why! of course like us!" laughed Tess, and Sandyface being away foraging for her brood, Tess seized the basket and carried it out on the porch, setting it down before Tom Jonah who was lying in the sun.

The big dog sniffed at the basket but did not offer to disturb the sleeping kittens. That would not do for the curious girls. They had to delve deeper into the natural lack of affinity between the canine and the feline families.

So Tess lifted one little black and white, squirmy kitten—just as its mother did, by the back of its neck—and set it upon the porch before the dog's nose. The kitten became awake instantly. Blind as it was, it stiffened its spine into an arch, backed away from the vicinity of the dog precipitately, and "spit" like a tiny tea-kettle boiling over.

"Oh! oh! the horrid thing," wailed Dot. "And poor Tom Jonah didn't do a thing to it!"

"But see him!" gasped Tess, in a gale of giggles.

For really, Tom Jonah looked too funny for anything. He turned away his head with a most

embarrassed expression of countenance and would not look again at the spitting little animal. He evidently felt himself in a most ridiculous position and finally got up and went off the porch altogether until the girls returned the basket of kittens to its proper place behind the stove.

At dinner that Sunday, when Uncle Rufus served the roast, he held the swinging door open until Tom Jonah paced in behind him into the dining-room. Seeing the roast placed before Mrs. MacCall, Tom Jonah sat down beside her chair in a good position to observe the feast; but waited his turn in a most gentlemanly manner.

Mrs. MacCall cut some meat for him and put it on a plate. This Uncle Rufus put before Tom Jonah; but the big dog did not offer to eat it until he was given permission. And now he no longer "gobbled," but ate daintily, and sat back when he was finished like any well-bred person, waiting for the next course.

Even Aunt Sarah looked with approval upon the new acquisition to the family of the old Corner House. She had heard the tale of his rescue of Ruth's poultry from the marauding Gypsy, and patted Tom Jonah's noble head.

"It's a good thing to have a watch-dog on the premises," she said, "with all that old silver and trash you girls insist upon keeping out of the plate-safe. Your Uncle Peter would turn in his grave if he knew how common you was makin' the Stower plate."

"But what is the good of having a thing if you don't make use of it?" queried Ruth, stoutly.

Ruth was a girl with a mind of her own, and not even the carping criticisms of Aunt Sarah could turn her from her course if once she was convinced that what she did was right. Nor was she frightened by her schoolmates' opinions—as note her friendship with Rosa Wildwood.

Bob Wildwood was a "character" in Milton. People smiled at him and forgave his peculiarities to a degree; but they could not respect him.

In the first place, Bob was a Southerner—and a Southerner in a New England town is just as likely to be misunderstood, as a Northerner in a Georgian town.

Bob and his daughter, Rosa, had drifted to Milton a couple of years previous. They had been "drifting" for most of the girl's short life; but now Rosa was quite big enough to have some influence with her shiftless father, and they had taken some sort of root in the harsh New England soil, so different from their own rich bottom-lands of the South.

Besides, Rosa was in ill health. She was "weakly"; Bob spoke of her as having "a mis'ry in her chest." Dr. Forsythe found that the girl had weak lungs, but he was sane and old-fashioned enough to scout the idea that she was in danger of becoming a victim of tuberculosis.

"If you go to work, Bob, and earn for her decent food and a warm shelter, she will pull

through and get as hearty and strong as our Northern girls," declared the doctor, sternly. "You say you lost her twin two years ago——"

"But I didn't done los' Juniper by no sickness," muttered Bob, shaking his head.

The Corner House girls thought Bob Wildwood a most amusing man, for he talked just like a darky (to their ears); but Uncle Rufus shook his head in scorn at Wildwood. "He's jes' no-'count white trash," the old colored man observed.

However, spurred by the doctor's threat, Bob let drink alone for the most part, and went to work for Rosa, his remaining daughter, who was just Ruth's age and was in her class at High—when she was well enough to get there. In spite of her blood and bringing up, Rosa Wildwood had a quick and retentive mind and stood well in her classes.

Bob became a coal-heaver. He worked for Lovell & Malmsey. He drove a pair of mules without lines, ordering them about in a most wonderful manner in a tongue entirely strange to Northern teamsters; and he was black with coal-dust from week-end to week-end. Ruth said there only was one visible white part of Rosa's father; that was the whites of his eyes.

The man must have loved his daughter very much, however; for it was his nature to be shiftless. He would have gone hungry and ragged himself rather than work. He now kept steadily at his job for Rosa's sake.

On Monday Rosa was not at school, and coming home to luncheon at noon, Ruth ran half a block out of her way to find out what was the matter. Not alone was the tenement the Wildwoods occupied a very poor one, but Rosa was no housekeeper. It almost disgusted the precise and prim Ruth Kenway to go into the three-room tenement.

Rosa had a cold, and of course it had settled on her chest. She was just dragging herself around to get something hot for Bob's dinner. Ruth made her go back to bed, and she finished the preparations.

When she came to make the tea, the Corner House girl was horrified to observe that the metal teapot had probably not been thoroughly washed out since the day the Wildwoods had taken up their abode in Milton.

"Paw likes to have the tea set back on the stove," drawled Rosa, with her pleasant Southern accent. "When he gets a chance, he runs in and 'takes a swig,' as he calls it, out of the pot. He says it's good for the gnawin' in his stomach —it braces him up an' is *so* much better than when he useter mix toddies," said the girl, gratefully. "We'd have had June with us yet, if it hadn't been for paw's toddies."

"Oh!" cried Ruth, startled. "I thought your sister June died?"

Rosa shook her head and the tears flowed into her soft eyes. "Oh, no. She went away. She

couldn't stand the toddies no more, she said—and her slavin' to keep the house nice, and us movin' on all the time. June was housekeeper—she was a long sight smarter'n me, Ruth."

"But the teachers at school think you are awfully smart," declared the Corner House girl.

"June warn't so smart at her books," said Rosa. "But she could do *anything* with her hands. You'd thunk she was two years older'n me, too. She was dark and handsome. She got mad, and run away, and then we started lookin' for her; but we've never found her yet," sighed Rosa. "And now I've got so miserable that I can't keep traveling with paw. So we got to stop here, and maybe we won't ever see June again."

"Oh! I hope you will," cried Ruth. "Now, your father's dinner is all ready to dish up. And I'll come back after school this afternoon and rid up the house for you; don't you do a thing."

Ruth had time that noon for only a bite at home, and explained to Mrs. MacCall that she would be late in returning from school. She carried a voluminous apron with her to cover her school frock when she set about "ridding up" the Wildwood domicile.

Ruth wanted to help Rosa; she hoped Rosa would keep up with the class and be promoted at the end of the term, as she was sure to be herself. And she was sorry for sooty, odd-talking Bob Wildwood.

What Rosa had said about her lost twin sister

had deeply interested Ruth Kenway. She wanted, too, to ask the Southern girl about "June," or Juniper.

"We were the last children maw had," said Rosa. "She just seemed to give up after we were born. The others were all sickly—just drooped and faded. And they all were girls and had flower names. Maw was right fanciful, I reckon.

"I wish June had held on. She'd stuck it out, I know, if she'd believed paw could stop drinking toddies. But, you see he *has*. He 'swigs' an awful lot of tea, though, and I expect it's tanning him inside just like he was leather!"

Ruth really thought this was probable—especially with the teapot in the condition she had found it. But she had put some washing soda in the pot, filled it with boiling water, and set it back on the stove to stew some of the "tannin" out of it.

While the Corner House girl was talking with Rosa in the little bedroom the girl called her own, Bob brought his mules to a halt before the house with an empty wagon, and ran in as usual.

The girls heard him enter the outer room; but Ruth never thought of what the man's object might be until Rosa laughed and said:

"There's paw now, for a swig at the teapot. I hope you left it full fo' him, Ruthie, dear."

"Oh, goodness mercy me!" cried the Corner House girl, and darted out to the kitchen to warn the man.

But she was too late. Already the begrimed Bob Wildwood had the spout of the teapot to his lips and several swallows of the scalding and acrid mixture gurgled down his throat before he discovered that it was not tea!

"Woof! woof! woof!" he sputtered, and flung pot and all away from him. "Who done tryin' poison me? Woof! I's scalded with poison!"

He coughed and spluttered over the sink, and then tried a draught of cold water from the spigot —which probably did him just as much good as anything.

"Oh, dear me, Mr. Wildwood!" gasped Ruth, standing with clasped hands and looking at the sooty man, half frightened. "I—I was just boiling the teapot out."

"Boilin' it out?"

"Yes, sir. With soda. I—I——It won't poison you, I guess."

"My Lawd!" groaned Bob. "What won't yo' Northerners do nex'? Wash out er teapot!" and he grumblingly went forth to his team and drove away.

Ruth felt that her good intentions were misunderstood—to a degree. But Rosa thanked her very prettily for what she had done, and the next day she was able to come to school again.

It was only a few days later that Carrie Poole invited a number of the high school girls and boys—and some of the younger set—to the last dance of the season at her home. She lived in a

huge old farmhouse, some distance out of town on the Buckshot road, and the Corner House girls and Neale O'Neil had spent several pleasant evenings there during the winter and spring.

The night before this party there was a big wind, and a part of one of the chimneys came down into the side yard during the night with a noise like thunder; so Ruth had to telephone for a mason before breakfast.

Had it not been for this happening, the Corner House girls—at least, Ruth and Agnes—and Neale O'Neil, would have escaped rather an embarrassing incident at the party.

Neale came over to supper the evening of the party, and he brought his pumps in a newspaper under his arm.

"Come on, girls, let's have your dancing slippers," he said to the two older Corner House girls, who were going to the dance. "I'll put them with mine."

And he did so—rolling the girls' pretty slippers up in the same parcel with his own. He left the parcel in the kitchen. Later it was discovered that the mason's helper had left a similarly wrapped parcel there, too.

When the three young folk started off, it was Agnes who ran back after the bundle of dancing slippers. Neale carried it under his arm, and they walked briskly out through the suburbs of Milton and on along the Buckshot road.

"Are you really going to Pleasant Cove this

summer, Neale?" demanded Agnes, as they went on together.

"If I can. Joe has asked me. And you girls?"

"Trix says we must come to her father's hotel for two weeks at least," Agnes declared.

"Humph!" said Neale, doubtfully. "Are you going, Ruth?"

"I—don't—know," admitted the older Corner House girl.

"Now, isn't that just too mean?" complained Agnes. "You just say that because you don't like Trix."

"I don't know whether Trix will be of the same mind when the time comes," said Ruth, firmly.

"I believe you," grunted Neale.

Agnes pouted. "It's just mean of you," she said. "Of course she will want us to go." While Agnes was "spoons" with a girl, she was always strictly loyal to her. She could not possibly see Trix Severn's faults just now.

They arrived at the farmhouse and found a crowd already assembled. There was a great deal of talking and laughter, and while Neale stood chatting with some of the boys in the hall, Ruth and Agnes came to him for their slippers.

"Sure!" said the boy, producing the newspaper-wrapped bundle he carried. "Guess I'll put on my own pumps, too."

He unrolled the parcel. Then a yell of derision and laughter arose from the onlookers; instead of

three pairs of dancing slippers, Neale produced two pairs of half-worn and lime-bespattered shoes belonging to the masons who had repaired the old Corner House chimney!

"Now we can't dance!" wailed Agnes.

"Oh, Neale!" gasped Ruth, while the young folk about them went off into another gale of laughter.

"Well, it wasn't my fault," grumbled Neale. "Aggie went after the bundle."

"Shouldn't have left them right there with the masons' bundle—so now!" snapped Agnes.

CHAPTER IV

THE MYSTERY OF JUNE WILDWOOD

Now, Trix Severn had maneuvered so as to get the very first dance with Neale O'Neil. Among all the boys who attended the upper grammar grades, and the High, of Milton, the boy who had been brought up in a circus was the best dancer. The older girls all were glad to get him for a partner.

Time had been when Trix sneered at "that circus boy," but that was before he and the two older Corner House girls had saved Trix from a collapsing snow palace back in mid-winter.

Since that time she had taken up with Agnes Kenway as her very closest chum, and she had visited the old Corner House a good deal. When Agnes and her sister arrived at the party on this evening, with Neale as escort, Trix determined to have at least *one* dance with the popular boy.

"Oh, Neale!" she whispered, fluttering up to him in her very nicest way, "Ruth and Agnes will be half an hour primping, upstairs. The music is going to strike up. Do let *us* have the first dance."

"All right," said Neale, good-naturedly.

It was the moment later that the discovery was

made of the masons' shoes in the bundle he carried under his arm.

"Now we can't dance," repeated Agnes, when the laughter had somewhat subsided.

"Oh, Neale can dance just as well," Trix said, carelessly. "Come on, Neale! You know this is *our* dance."

Of course Neale could dance in his walking shoes. But he saw Agnes' woebegone face and he hesitated.

"It's too bad, Aggie," he said. "If it wasn't so far——"

"Why, Neale O'Neil!" snapped Trix, unwisely. "You don't mean to say you'd be foolish enough to go clear back to the Corner House for those girls' slippers?"

Perhaps it was just this opposition that was needed to start Neale off. He pulled his cap from his pocket and turned toward the door, with a shrug. "I guess I can get back in an hour, Ag. Don't you and Ruth dance much in your heavy shoes until then. You'll tire yourselves all out."

"Why, Neale O'Neil!" cried Trix. "You won't do it?"

Even Ruth murmured against the boy's making the trip for the slippers. "We can get along, Neale," she said, in her quiet way.

"And you promised to dance with me this first dance," declared Trix, angrily, as the music began.

Neale did not pay much attention to her—at the moment. "It's my fault, I guess," he said, laughing. "I'll go back for them, Ag."

But Trix got right between him and the door. "Now! you sha'n't go off and leave me in the lurch that way, Neale O'Neil!" she cried, shrilly.

"Aw——There are other dances. Wait till I come back," he said.

"You can dance in the shoes you have on," Trix said, sharply.

"What if?"

"But *we* can't, Trix," interposed Agnes, much distressed. "Ruth and I, you know——"

"I don't care!" interrupted Trix, boiling over at last. "You Corner House girls are the most selfish things! You'd spoil his fun for half the party——"

"Aw, don't bother!" growled Neale, in much disgust.

"I will bother! You——"

"Guess she thinks she owns you, Neale," chuckled one of the boys, adding fuel to the flames. Neale did not feel any too pleasant after that. He flung away from Trix Severn's detaining grasp.

"I'm going—it isn't any of *your* concern," he muttered, to the angry girl.

Ruth bore Agnes away. She was half crying. The rift in the intimacy between her soulmate and herself was apparent to all.

To make the matter worse—according to Trix's

version—when Neale finally returned, almost breathless, with the mislaid slippers, he insisted, first of all, upon dancing with Ruth and Agnes. Then he would have favored Trix (Ruth had advised it), but the angry girl would not speak to him.

"He's nothing but a low circus boy, anyway!" she told Lucy Poole. "And I don't think really well-bred girls would care to have anything to do with him."

Those who heard her laughed. They had known Trix Severn's ways for a long time. She had been upon her good behavior; but it did not surprise her old acquaintances that she should act like this.

It made a difference to the Corner House girls, however, for it made their plans about going to Pleasant Cove uncertain.

The other girls knew that Trix had invited the Corner House girls for the first two weeks after graduation, and that Ruth had tentatively accepted. Therefore even Pearl Harrod—who wanted Ruth and her sisters, herself—scarcely knew whether to put in a claim for them or not.

Graduation Day was very near at hand; the very day following the closing of the Milton High, several family parties were to leave for the seaside resort which was so popular in this part of New England.

They had to pass through Bloomingsburg to get to it, but when the Kenways had lived in that

city, they had never expected to spend any part of the summer season at such a beautiful summer resort as Pleasant Cove.

It was a bungalow colony, with several fine hotels, built around a tiny, old-fashioned fishing port. There was a still cove, a beautiful river emptying into it, and outside, a stretch of rocky Atlantic coast on which the ocean played grim tunes during stormy weather.

This was as much as the Corner House girls knew about it as yet. But they all looked forward to their first visit to the place with keen delight. Tess and Dot were talking about the expected trip a good deal of the time they were awake. Most of their doll-play was colored now by thoughts of Pleasant Cove.

They were not too busy to help Mrs. MacCall take the last of the winter clothing to the garret, however, and see her pack it away in the chests there. As she did this the housekeeper sprinkled, with lavish hand, the camphor balls among the layers of clothing.

Dot had tentatively tasted one of the hard, white balls, and shuddered. "But they *do* look so much like candy, Tess," she said. Then she suddenly had another thought:

"Oh, Mrs. MacCall! what do you suppose the poor moths had to live on 'way back in the Garden of Eden before Adam and Eve wore any clothes?"

"Now, can you beat *that?*" demanded the

housekeeper, of nobody in particular. "What won't that young one get in her head?"

Meanwhile Ruth was helping Rosa Wildwood all she could, so that the girl from the South would be able to pass in the necessary examinations and stand high enough in the class to be promoted.

Housework certainly "told on" Rosa. Bob said "it jest seems t' take th' puckerin' string all out'n her—an' she jest draps down like a flower."

"We'll help her, Mr. Wildwood," Ruth said. "But she really ought to have a rest."

"Hi Godfrey!" ejaculated the coal heaver. "I tell her she kin let the housework go. We don't have no visitors—savin' an' exceptin' *you*, ma'am."

"But she wants to keep the place decent, you see," Ruth told him. "And she can scarcely do that and keep up with her studies—now. You see, she's so weak."

"Hi Godfrey!" exclaimed the man again. "Ain't thar sech a thing as bein' a mite *too* clean?"

But Bob Wildwood had an immense respect for Ruth; likewise he was grateful because she showed an interest in his last remaining daughter.

"I tell you, sir," the oldest Corner House girl said, gravely. "Rosa needs a change and a rest. And all us girls are going to Pleasant Cove this summer. Will you let Rosa come down, too, for a while, if I pay her way and look out for her?"

The man was somewhat disturbed by the question. "Yuh see, Miss," he observed, scratching his head thoughtfully, "she's all I got. I'd plumb be lost 'ithout Rosa."

"But only for a week or two."

"I know. And I wouldn't want tuh stand in her way. I crossed her sister too much—that's what *I* did. Juniper was a sight more uppity than Rosa—otherwise she wouldn't have flew the coop," said Bob Wildwood, shaking his head.

Ruth, all tenderness for his bereavement, hastened to say: "Oh, you'll find her again, sir. Surely you don't believe she's dead?"

"No. If she ain't come to a *bad* end, she's all right somewhar. But she'd oughter be home with her sister—and with me. Ye see, she was pretty—an' smart. No end smart! She went off in bad comp'ny."

"How do you mean, Mr. Wildwood?" asked Ruth, deeply interested.

"Travelin' folks. They had a van an' a couple team o' mules, an' the man sold bitters an' corn-salve. The woman dressed mighty fine, an' she took June's eye.

"We follered 'em a long spell, me an' Rosa. But we didn't never ketch up to 'em. If we had, I'd sure tuck a hand-holt of that medicine man. He an' his woman put all the foolishness inter Juniper's haid.

"An' Rosa misses her sister like poison, too," finished Bob Wildwood, slowly shaking his head.

There seemed to be a mystery connected with the disappearance of Rosa's sister, and Ruth Kenway was just as curious as she could be about it; but she stuck to her subject until Bob Wildwood agreed to spare his remaining daughter for at least a week's visit to Pleasant Cove, while the Corner House girls would be there.

CHAPTER V

OFF FOR THE SEASIDE

The last hours of the school term were busy ones indeed. Even Tess had her troublesome "'zaminations." At the study table on the last evening before her own grade had its closing exercises, Tess propounded the following:

"Ruthie, what's a 'scutcheon?"

"Um—um," said Ruth, far away.

"A *what,* child?" demanded Agnes. "'S 'Scutcheon?' "

"'Escutcheon,' she means," chuckled Neale, who was present as usual at study hour.

"Well, what *is* it?" begged Tess, plaintively.

"Why?" demanded Ruth, suddenly waking up. "That's a hard word for a small girl, Tess."

"It says here," quoth Tess, "that 'There was a blot upon his escutcheon.' "

"Oh, yes—sure," drawled Neale, as Ruth hesitated. "That must mean a fancy vest, Tess. And he spilled soup on it—sure!"

"Now Neale! how horrid!" admonished Ruth, while Agnes giggled.

"I do think you are all awful mean to me," wailed Tess. "You don't tell me a thing. You're almost as mean as Trix Severn was to

me to-day. I don't want to go to her father's hotel, so there! Have we got to, Ruthie?"

"What did she do to you, Tess?" demanded Agnes, with a curiosity she could not quench. For, deep as the chasm had grown between her and her former chum, she could not ignore Trix.

"She just turned up her nose at me," complained Tess, "when I went by; and I heard her say to some girl she was with: 'There goes one of them now. They pushed their way into our party, and I s'pose we've got to entertain them.' Now, *did* we push our way in, Ruthie?"

Ruth was angry. It was not often that she displayed indignation, so that when she did so, the other girls—and even Neale—were the more impressed.

"Of course she was speaking of that wretched invitation she gave us to stay at her father's hotel at Pleasant Cove," said Ruth. "Well!"

"Oh, Ruthie! don't say you won't go," begged Agnes.

"I'll never go to that Overlook House unless we pay our way—be sure of that," declared the angry Ruth.

"But we *are* going to the shore, Ruthie?" asked Tess.

"Yes."

"Maybe Pearl Harrod will ask us again," murmured Agnes, hopefully.

"I guess we can pay our way and be beholden to nobody," said Ruth, shortly. "I will hire one

of the tents, if nothing else. And we'll start the very day after High closes, just as we planned."

Despite the loss of her "soulmate," Agnes was pretty cheerful. She was to graduate from grammar school; and although she was sorry to lose Miss Georgiana Shipman as a teacher, she was delighted to get out of "the pigtail classes," as she rudely termed the lower grades.

"I'm going to do up my hair, Ruthie, whatever you say," she declared, "just as soon as I get into high school next fall. I'm old enough to forget braids and hair-ribbons, I should hope!"

"Not yet, my child, not yet," laughed Ruth. "Why! there are more girls in High who wear their hair *down* than *up*."

"But I'm so big——"

"You mean, you'd be big," chuckled Neale, "if you were only rolled out," for he was always teasing Agnes about her plumpness.

"Well! I want to celebrate some way," sighed Agnes. "Can't we have a specially nice supper that night?"

"Surely, child," said her sedate sister. "What do you want?"

"Well!" repeated Agnes, slowly; "you know I'll never graduate from Grammar again. Couldn't we kill some of those nice frying chickens of yours, Ruthie?"

"Oh, my!" cried Neale. "What have the poor chickens done that they should be slaughtered to make a Roman holiday?"

"Mr. Smartie!" snapped Agnes. "You be good, or you sha'n't have any."

"If that Tom Jonah hadn't been busy on a certain night, none of us would have eaten those particular frying chickens," laughed Neale. "I wonder if that Gypsy is running yet?"

"He didn't get the frying chickens in the bag," said Agnes. "They were in another coop. We hatched them in January and brought them up by hand. Say! I don't believe you know much about natural history, Neale, anyway."

"I guess he knows more than Sammy Pinkney does," Tess said, again drawn into the conversation. "Teacher asked him to tell us two breeds of dairy cattle and which gives the most milk. She'd been reading to us about it out of a book. So Sammy says:

" 'The bull and the cow, Miss Andrews; and the cow gives the most milk.' "

Dot's school held its closing exercises one morning, and Tess' in the afternoon. Then came the graduation of Agnes and Neale O'Neil from the grammar school. Ruth was excused from her own classes at High long enough to attend her sister's graduation.

Although the plump Corner House girl was no genius, she always stood well in her classes. Ruth saw to that, for what Agnes did not learn at school she had to study at home.

So she stood well up in her class, and she *did* look "too distractingly pretty," as Mrs. MacCall

declared, when she gave the last touches to Agnes' dress before she started for school that last day. Miss Ann Titus, Milton's most famous seamstress and "gossip-in-ordinary," had outdone herself in making Agnes' dress. No girl in her class—not even Trix Severn—was dressed so becomingly.

The envious Trix heard the commendations showered on her former friend, and her face grew sourer and her temper sharper. She well knew she had invited the Corner House girls to be her guests at Pleasant Cove; but she did not want them in her party now. She did not know how to get out of "the fix," as she called it in her own mind.

She had intimated to two or three other girls who were going, however, that Agnes and Ruth had forced the invitation from her in a moment of weakness. If she had to number them of her party, Miss Trix proposed to make it just as unpleasant for the Kenway sisters as she could.

High school graduation was on Thursday. On Friday a special through train was put on by the railroad from Milton to Pleasant Cove. It was scheduled to leave the former station at ten o'clock.

Luckily Mrs. MacCall had insisted upon having all the trunks and bags packed the day before, for on this Friday morning the Corner House girls had little time for anything but saying "good-

bye'' to their many friends, both human and dumb.

"Whatever will Tom Jonah think?" cried Tess, hugging the big dog that had taken up his abode at the Corner House so strangely. "He'll think we have run away from him, poor fellow!"

"Oh! *don't* you think that, Tom Jonah!" begged Dot, seizing the dog on the other side. "We all love you so! And we'll come back to you."

"You'll give him just the best care ever, won't you, Uncle Rufus?" cried Agnes.

"Sho' will!" agreed the old colored man.

"*Can't* we take him with us, Ruthie?" asked Dot.

Ruth would have been tempted to do just this had she been sure that they would hire a tent in the colony as soon as they reached Pleasant Cove. Tom Jonah was just the sort of a protector the Corner House girl would have chosen under those circumstances.

But Ruth was puzzled. She had not seen Pearl Harrod, and was not sure whether Pearl had completely filled her uncle's bungalow with guests or not. Of one thing Ruth was sure: if they went to the Overlook House (Mr. Terrence Severn's hotel), they would pay their board and refuse to be Trix's guests.

When the carriage came for them, Tom Jonah stood at the gate and watched them get in and

drive away with a rather depressed air. Dot and Tess waved their handkerchiefs from the carriage window at him as long as they could see the big dog.

There was much confusion at the station. Many people whom the girls knew were on the platform, or in the cars already. Trix Severn was very much in evidence. The Kenway sisters saw the other girls who were going to accept Miss Severn's hospitality in a group at one side, but they hesitated to join this party.

Trix passed the Kenways twice and did not even look at them. Of course, she knew the sisters were there, but Ruth believed that the mean-spirited girl merely wished them to speak to her so that she could snub them publicly.

"Well, Ruthie Kenway!" exclaimed a voice suddenly behind the Corner House girls.

It was Pearl Harrod. Pearl was a bright-faced, big girl, jovial and kind-hearted. "I've just been looking for you everywhere," pursued Pearl. "Here it is the last minute, and you haven't told me whether you and the other girls are going to my uncle's house or not."

"Why—if you are sure you want us?" queried Ruth, with a little break in her voice.

"I should say yes!" exclaimed Pearl. "But I was afraid you had been asked by some one else."

Trix turned and looked the four sisters over scornfully. Then she tossed her head. "Wait-

ing like beggars for an invitation from *somebody*," she said, loudly enough for all the girls nearby to hear. "You'd think, if those Corner House girls are as rich as they tell about, that they'd pay their way."

CHAPTER VI

ON THE TRAIN

"Don't you mind what that mean thing says," whispered Pearl Harrod, quickly.

She had seen Ruth flush hotly and the tears spring to Agnes' eyes when Trix Severn had spoken so ill-naturedly. The younger Corner House girls did not hear, but Ruth and Agnes were hurt to the quick.

"You are very, very kind, Pearl," said Ruth. "But we had thought of going to the tent colony——"

"Didn't Trix Severn ask you to her place?" demanded Pearl, hotly. "I *know* she did. And now she insults you. If she hadn't asked you first, and seemed so thick with your sister, Ruth, I would have insisted long ago that you all come to uncle's bungalow. There's plenty of room, for my aunt and the girls won't be down for a fortnight."

"But, Pearl——"

"I'll be mad if you don't agree—now I know that Trix has released you, Ruth Kenway," cried the good-hearted girl. "Now, don't let's say another word about it."

"Oh, don't be angry!" begged Ruth. "But won't it look as though we *were* begging our way —as Trix says?"

"Pooh! who cares for Trix Severn?"

"You—you are very kind," said Ruth, yielding at length.

"Then you come on. Hey, girls!" she shouted, running after her own particular friends who were climbing aboard the rear car. "I've gotten them to promise. The Corner House girls are going with us—for two weeks, anyway."

At once the other girls addressed cheered and gathered the four Kenways into their group, with great rejoicing. The sting of Trix Severn's unkindness was forgotten.

Mr. Howbridge, their guardian, came to the station to see them off, and shook hands with Ruth through the window of the car. When the train actually moved away, Neale O'Neil was there in the crowd, swinging his cap and wishing them heaps of fun. Neale expected to go to Pleasant Cove himself, later in the season.

This last car of the special train was a day coach; but the light-hearted girls did not mind the lack of conveniences and comforts to be obtained in the chair cars. The train was supposed to arrive at Pleasant Cove by three o'clock, and a five hour ride on a hot June day was only "fun" for the Corner House girls and their friends.

Ruth first of all got the brakeman to turn over a seat so that she and her three sisters could

sit facing each other. Mrs. MacCall had put them up a nice hamper of luncheon and the older girl knew this would be better enjoyed if the seats were thus arranged.

Of course, there was the usual desire of some of the travelers to have windows open while others wished them closed. Cinders and dust flew in by the peck if the former arrangement prevailed, while the heat was intense if the sashes were down.

Tess and Dot were little disturbed by these physical ills. But they had their own worries. Dot, who had insisted on carrying the Alice-doll in her arms, was troubled mightily to remember whether she had packed the whole of the doll's trousseau (this was supposed to be a wedding journey for the Alice-doll—a wedding journey in which the bridegroom had no part); while Tess wondered what would happen to Tom Jonah and Sandyface's young family while they were all gone from the old Corner House.

"I feel condemned—I do, indeed, Dot," sighed Tess. "We ought, at least, to have named those four kittens before we left. They'll be awfully old before the christening—if we don't come back at the end of our first two weeks."

"What could happen to them?" demanded Dot.

"Why—croup—or measles—or chicken-pox. They're only babies, you know. And if one should die," added Tess, warmly, "we wouldn't even know what name to put on its gravestone!"

"My! lots of things can happen in two weeks, I s'pose," agreed Dot. "Do you think we ought to stay away from home so long?"

"I guess we'll have to if Ruth and Aggie stay," said Tess. "But I shall worry."

Meanwhile Agnes, who sat with her back to the engine beside Ruth, had become interested in a couple sitting together not far down the car. They were strangers—and strangely dressed, as well.

"Oh, Ruth!" Agnes exclaimed, under her breath, "they look like Gypsies."

"If they are, they are much better dressed than any Gypsies we ever saw before," observed her sister.

"But how gay!"

This comment was just enough. The older one had shocking taste in millinery. She wore, too, long, pendant ear-rings and her fingers were covered with gaudy looking jewels. Her garments were rich in texture, but oddly made, and the contrasts in color were, as Agnes whispered, "fierce!"

"That girl with her is handsome, just the same," Ruth declared.

"Oh! isn't she?" whispered the enthusiastic Agnes. "A perfectly stunning brunette."

If she were a Gypsy girl she was a very beautiful one. Her features were lovely and her complexion brilliant. When she smiled she flashed two rows of perfect teeth upon the beholder. She

might have been a year or two older than Ruth.

"I don't know—somehow—she reminds me of somebody," murmured the latter.

"Who?"

"The girl."

"She reminds me of that chicken-thief Tom Jonah treed on the henhouse roof," chuckled Agnes.

"Oh!" exclaimed Ruth; "all Gypsies can't be alike."

"Humph! you never heard a good word said for them," sniffed Agnes.

"But that doesn't prove there are not good ones. They are a wandering people and have no particular trade or standing in any community. Naturally they have a lot of crimes laid upon their shoulders that they never commit," said the just Ruth.

"That was one of them that tried to steal your hens, just the same," said Agnes.

"I suppose so," admitted her sister. "But surely *these* two cannot belong to the same kind of Gypsies. See how richly they are dressed."

"I guess that doesn't make any difference," said Agnes. "They are all cut off the same piece of goods," and immediately she lost interest in the strange couple when Lucy Poole came up the aisle to speak to her.

Ruth had the gaily dressed woman and her companion on her mind a good deal. She often

looked at them when they did not notice her. The woman must have been forty, but was straight, lithe, and of good figure. She sat on the outer end of the seat, having the girl between her and the window.

The latter seemed more and more familiar in appearance to Ruth as she looked, yet the Corner House girl could not say whom the girl looked like.

The latter scarcely spoke to her companion. Indeed, she kept her face toward the window for the most part, and seemed to be in a sullen mood. She had smiled once at Dot and the Alice-doll, and that was the only time Ruth had seen the dark, beautiful face with an attractive expression upon it.

The woman seemed talkative enough, but what language she jabbered to her companion the Corner House girl could not tell. She frequently leaned toward the dark girl, her bejeweled fingers seizing the sleeve of her waist, and her speech was both emphatic and loud.

The rattle of the train drowned, however, most of the woman's words. Ruth arose and went the length of the car for a drink, just for the purpose of overhearing the strange speech of the Gypsy (if such the woman was) for she was sure the language was not English.

She heard nothing intelligible. Ruth folded a cup, filled it at the ice-water tank, and brought it

back for the children. Pearl Harrod was sitting directly behind the two strangers, in a seat with Carrie Poole.

"Oh, I say, Ruth!" Pearl said, "is it a fact that Rosa Wildwood is coming down to the Cove next week?"

Ruth turned to answer. As she did so the girl in the seat with the Gypsy sprang to her feet, her face transfigured with amazement, or alarm—Ruth did not know which. The woman grabbed her by the elbow and pulled her back into the seat, saying something of a threatening nature to her companion.

In her excitement the woman knocked the cup of water from Ruth's hand. She turned to apologize, and Ruth, looking over her head, saw the dark-skinned girl sitting back in her corner quite colorless and broken. The Corner House girl was sure, too, that the strange girl's lips formed the name "Rosa Wildwood"—but she made no sound.

"It is all right," Ruth assured the Gypsy woman. "No harm done."

"I am the ver' awkward one—eh?" repeated the woman, with a hard smile.

"It does not matter," said Ruth. "I can get another cup of water."

She returned to do so. All the while she was wondering what the incident meant. It was not merely a chance happening, she was sure. Something about the name of her schoolmate, Rosa

Wildwood, had frightened the beautiful girl who was evidently in the Gypsy woman's care.

Ruth grew quite excited as she drew another cup of water, and she swiftly planned to discover the mystery, as she started up the aisle of the coach a second time.

CHAPTER VII

SOMETHING AHEAD

Pearl Harrod was now busily talking with Carrie Poole again; she had probably forgotten about Rosa Wildwood for the time being. But Ruth stopped at her seat—the seat directly behind that occupied by the two strangers.

"You asked about Rosa, Pearl?" said Ruth, speaking loudly enough, she was sure, for the girl in front to hear.

"Oh, hello! don't spill that water again, Ruthie," laughed Pearl. "Yes. I asked if she were coming down to the Cove?"

"Yes. Rosa Wildwood expects to come next week. I am going to find her a boarding place."

Ruth spoke very distinctly, and she kept her eyes fastened upon the back of the strange girl's head. But the latter gave no sign of having heard—at least, she appeared not to be interested in the name which had before so startled her.

"I don't see how the poor girl can afford it," Carrie Poole said, not unkindly. "They say she and her father are very poor."

"Mr. Bob Wildwood works regularly. He doesn't drink any more," Ruth explained, in-

tentionally speaking so that those in the forward seat could hear if they wished to listen.

"Rosa is an awfully sweet girl," said Carrie.

"I love that little Southern drawl of hers!" cried Pearl. "She says 'Ah reckon so' in just the *cunningest* way!"

"She is very frail," Ruth continued, clearly. "I was afraid she would break down before the school term closed. Now it has been arranged for her to stay at Pleasant Cove until she gains strength. Dr. Forsythe says it will do her a world of good."

"We'll give her a good time, all right," declared Pearl. "Wish we could have her with us——"

"Not at the bungalow," said Ruth. "Nor at the hotel. We want a quiet place for her. I shall find it."

Not a sign did the girl in front give that she heard any of this conversation. Yet Ruth believed there was a curious intentness in her manner—she held her head very still as though she were secretly listening, while apparently giving all her attention to what the train passed.

"What does your uncle call his bungalow—where we shall stop?" asked Ruth of Pearl.

"Why, the Spoondrift—don't you remember? It's at this end of the cove, near the river, and we have bathing rights on the shore. It's a fine place. You'll *love* it, Ruth Kenway."

"I expect to," said Ruth, seriously. "And you

were very kind to ask me to stay two whole weeks with you,'' and Ruth passed on.

She had intentionally said enough so that, if the strange girl *were* listening, she would learn just where Ruth could be found at Pleasant Cove.

For the Corner House girl felt that the dark beauty with the Gypsy woman held some keen interest in Rosa Wildwood. Of course—right at the start—the story of Rosa's lost sister, June, had come into Ruth's mind.

Yet, as the Corner House girl looked at the stranger, she could not say truthfully that it was Rosa of whom *this* girl reminded her. Ruth conjured before her mind's eye the fair, delicate beauty of Bob Wildwood's daughter; the two girls possessed no feature in common—and in complexion they were, of course, diametrically opposed.

This girl was dark enough and savage enough looking to be a Gypsy. Ruth scouted the idea that she might be Juniper Wildwood, who had run away with a traveling ''medicine man'' and his wife.

Nevertheless, Ruth believed that the strange girl must know something about the lost June Wildwood. She had been startled when Rosa's name was mentioned. The Corner House girl was deeply interested in the affair; but at present she did not want to take anybody into her confidence about it—not even Agnes.

The girls did not remain quietly in their seats, by any manner of means. First there was a crowd blocking the aisle in one part of the car, then in another. Agnes was in and out of her seat half a dozen times between stations. The heat and dust was ignored as the girls shouted pleasantries back and forth; the air was vibrant with laughter.

"I'm just as anxious to see the ocean as I can be," declared Lucy Poole who, like the Corner House girls, had never been to Pleasant Cove before.

"Oh, dear me!" scoffed her cousin Carrie. "It's only a big, big pond! Our frog pond at home looks like a piece of the ocean—when it's calm."

The others laughed and Pearl said: "Guess Lucy wants to see Old Ocean in its might, eh? Big storm, whales, great ships——"

"A sea serpent!" cried Agnes.

"Of course—if there *is* such a thing," admitted Lucy. "A sea serpent must be an awfully interesting sight."

"There aren't any more," said Pearl. "Father Neptune's all out of stock."

"I guess the sea serpent is something like the *snakes* alcoholic victims think they see," proposed Carrie.

"Oh, no," proclaimed Agnes. "Here's what I read about the sea serpent:

" 'The old sea serpent used to rave
And fiercely roam about;
He hit a prohibition wave,
And that's what knocked him out.' "

" 'Perils of the Deep!' " laughed Ruth. "But even if we don't see serpents in the ocean, I expect we'll have plenty of adventures down there at the shore."

Which prophecy was strangely fulfilled.

The train reached Bloomingsburg about one o'clock, and was immediately shifted to the single-tracked branch line that connected that small city with Pleasant Cove. The speed of the train after leaving Bloomingsburg was not great, for it was often held up for trains coming from the shore to pass.

The adult passengers grew impatient and wearied. There were many complaints, and the babies began to fret and cry. But our friends in the last coach remained in a jolly and—for the most part—kindly mood.

Trix Severn had taken her crowd into a forward coach. Her father owning one of the big hotels at the Cove, the railroad company had presented him with a sheaf of chair coupons. So, as Pearl Harrod laughingly said, "Trix's party was as swell as a wet sponge."

"I don't suppose any of that crowd at the Overlook House will talk to *us*," said Pearl. "Just the same, I guess I can show you girls a good time

at Spoondrift. Uncle always lets us do just as we like. He's the *dearest* man."

The train rattled on and on. The alternate pine forests and swamp lands seemed interminable. Now and then they went through a cut, the railroad bisecting a hickory ridge.

But soon there was a change in the air. When the cinders and dust did not sift into the windows, there was a smell of salt marsh. The air seemed suddenly cleaner. At one station where they stopped, a salt creek came in, and there was a dock, and boats, and barrels of clams and fish piled on the platform ready for the next up-train.

"Regular maritime smell——whew!" sighed Carrie Poole, holding her nose delicately.

"Oh! The *whole* of Pleasant Cove doesn't smell like this, does it?" demanded her cousin.

"Only the old part of it—the old village."

"Well! that's lucky," said Lucy. "If this odor prevailed I should say the place ought to be called *Un*-pleasant Cove."

"How far are we from the jumping-off place?" demanded Agnes. "I'd like to get out and run."

Pearl stooped to look out under one of the drawn shades. "Why!" she said, "there are only two more stops before we reach the Cove station. It's a winding way the railroad follows. But if we got off about here and went right through those woods yonder, we'd reach the Spoondrift bungalow in an hour. I've walked over here to Jumpertown many a time."

"Jumpertown?"

"Yes. That's what they called it before the real estate speculators gave it the fancy name of 'Ridgedale Station.'"

At that moment the train suddenly slowed down. The brakes grated upon the wheels and everybody clung to the seats for support. One of the brakemen ran through from the front and the girls clamored to know the cause of the stoppage.

"Bridge down up front," said the railroad employee. "Tide rose last night and loosened the supports. We've got to wait."

"Oh, dear me!" was the general wail. When they could get hold of the conductor the girls demanded to know the length of time they would be delayed.

"Can't tell you, young ladies," declared the man of the punch. "There's a repair gang at work on it now."

"An hour?" demanded Pearl Harrod.

"Oh, longer than that," the conductor assured her.

"But what shall we do? We want to get to the bungalow and air the bedclothes, and all that, before dark," she cried.

"Guess you'll have to walk, then," said the conductor, laughing, and went away.

"That's just what we'll do," Pearl said to her friends. "Can the children walk three miles, Ruth?"

"Surely they can!" Agnes cried. "If they can't, we'll carry them."

Ruth was doubtful of the wisdom of the move, but her opinion was not asked.

"Come on! let's get out quietly. We'll fool all these other folks," said Pearl. "We'll get to Pleasant Cove long before they do."

CHAPTER VIII

THE GYPSY CAMP

There were two things that encouraged Ruth Kenway, the oldest Corner House girl, to accompany Pearl Harrod's party through the woods without objection. Pearl told her that when they reached the highway on the other side of the timber in all probability they would be overtaken by an auto-bus that ran four times a day between a station on a rival railroad line and the Cove.

This was one thing. The other reason for Ruth's leaving the train with her sisters, and without objection, was the fact that the strangely dressed woman and the pretty, dark girl had left it already.

When the train first stopped and the brakeman announced the accident ahead, the woman had spoken to the girl and they both had risen and left the car. Perhaps nobody had noticed them but Ruth. The strange girl had not looked at Ruth when she passed her, but the woman had bowed and smiled in a cat-like fashion.

Pearl said they would follow a path through the timber to the road; and she pointed out the direction through the window. Ruth saw the

woman and girl strike into this very path and disappear.

So curiosity, too, led the oldest Corner House girl to agree to Pearl's plan. The party of ten girls, including Ruth, Agnes, Tess and Dot Kenway, slipped out of the car without being questioned by any of the older people there. Nobody observed them enter the cool and fragrant woods. Chattering and laughing, they were quickly in the shadowy depths and out of sight of the hot train.

"Oh, isn't this heavenly!" cried Agnes, tossing up her hat by the ribbons that were supposed to tie it under her plump chin.

The green tunnel of the woodpath stretched a long way before them. It was paved with pine needles and last-year's oakleaves.

Ruth looked sharply ahead, but did not see either the woman or the girl, in whom she was so much interested. Either they had gone on very rapidly, or had turned aside into the wood.

Dot had made no complaint upon being forced to leave the train; but she clung very tightly now to the Alice-doll, and finally ventured to ask Tess:

"What—what do you think is the chance for *bears* in this wood, Tess? Don't you think there may be some?"

"Bears? Whoever heard the like? Of course not, child," said Tess, in her most elder-sisterly way. "What gave you such an idea as that?"

"Well—it's a strange woods, Tess. We aren't really acquainted here."

"But Pearl is," declared Tess, stoutly.

"I don't care. I'd rather have Tom Jonah with us. Suppose a bear should jump out and grab Alice?" and she hugged the doll all the closer in her arms. For her own safety she evidently was not anxious.

The girls, after their ride in the train, were like young colts let loose in a paddock. They sang and laughed and capered; and when they came to a softly carpeted hollow, Pearl Harrod led the way and rolled down the slope, instead of walking down in a "decorous manner, as high school young ladies should," quoth Carrie.

"If our dear, *de-ar* teachers should see us now!" gasped Pearl sitting up at the foot of the slide, with a peck of pine needles in her hair and her frock all tousled.

Their only baggage was the lunch baskets and boxes. All other of their personal possessions were on the train, in the baggage car. But the remains of the luncheons came in very nicely. Before they had gone a mile through the wood they were all loudly proclaiming their hunger.

So they found a spring, and camped about it, eating the remainder of the lunches to the very last crumb. And such a hilarious "feed" as it was!

Ruth forgot all about the Gypsy woman and the girl who had so puzzled her by her actions. The

rest by the spring refreshed even Dot. She was plucky, if she *was* little; and she made no complaint at all about the long walk through the stretch of timber.

The party did not hurry after that rest. It was still early in the afternoon and Pearl, referring to her watch, said they would surely catch the auto-stage that passed on the main road about four o'clock.

"You see, there are no servants at the bungalow yet," Pearl explained. "Uncle has been taking his meals at one of the small boarding-houses nearby, that opens early. He is a great fisherman, and always goes down early and 'roughs it' at the bungalow until my aunt comes down.

"But she thought we girls would be able to get on all right—with Uncle Phil to give us a hand if we need him. We'll have to air bedclothes, and get in groceries, and otherwise start housekeeping to-night."

"Why! it will be great fun," Ruth said. "Just like playing house together."

"Say!" cried Agnes. "We want more than 'play-house' food to eat—now I warn you! No sweet crackers and 'cambric tea' for mine, if you please!"

"Oh! if I ask him," said Pearl, laughing, "I know Uncle Phil will take us to his boarding-house to supper to-night—if we get there late. But I want to show him what ten girls can do toward housekeeping."

"There'll be plenty of cooks to spoil the broth," sighed Agnes. "Did you ever see *me* fry an egg?"

Ruth began to laugh. The single occasion when Agnes had tried her hand at the breakfast eggs was a day marked for remembrance at the old Corner House.

"What can you do to a defenseless egg, Aggie?" Lucy Poole demanded.

"Plenty!" declared Agnes, shaking her head. "When I get through with an egg, a lump of butter, and a frying-pan, there is left a residue of charred 'what is it?' in the bottom of the pan, an odor of burned grease in the kitchen—and me in hysterics! It was an awful occasion when I tackled that egg. I've not felt just right about approaching an egg since that never-to-be-forgotten day."

"I was left home to cook for my father, once," said Carrie Poole, seriously, "and he asked to have boiled rice for supper. Mother never let me cook much, and I didn't know a thing about *rice.*

"But I saw the grains were awfully small, and I knew my father liked a great, heaping bowlful when he had it, so I told the grocery boy to bring two pounds, and I tried to cook it all."

A general laugh hailed this announcement. Agnes asked: "What happened, Carrie? I don't know anything about rice myself—'cepting that it's good in cakes and you throw it after

brides for luck—and—and Chinamen live on it."

"Wait!" urged Carrie, solemnly. "It's nothing to laugh at. I began cooking it in a four quart saucepan, so as to give it plenty of room; and when father came in just before supper time, I had the whole top of our big range covered with pots and pans into which I had dipped the overflow of that two pounds of rice!

"Oh, yes, I had!" said Carrie, warmly, while the others screamed with laughter. "And I had gotten so excited by that time that I begged father to go out to the washhouse and bring in the big clothes boiler, so's to see if I could keep the stuff from running over onto the stove.

"You never saw such a mess," concluded Carrie, shaking her head. "And we had to eat rice for a week!"

It was just here that Agnes spied something far ahead beside the woodspath.

"Oh!" she cried, "are we in sight of the tent colony you tell about, so soon?"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Pearl Harrod. "We're nowhere near the river."

"But there's a tent!" exclaimed Agnes, earnestly.

"And I see the top of another," said Lucy Poole.

"Dirty brown things, both of them. Look more like Indian wigwams," announced Ann Presby.

"My goodness, girls! there are the Gypsies

Uncle Phil wrote about," said Pearl, in some excitement. "Let's get our fortunes told."

"Oh, dear me," said Ruth, rather worriedly. "I don't just *like* Gypsies."

"Oh, you haven't got to hug and kiss them!" laughed Pearl. "Come on! they're lots of fun."

But when the party of girls drew nearer to the Gypsy camp, this particular tribe of Nomads did not appear to be "lots of fun," after all.

In the first place, the tents—as Ann had said—were very shabby and dirty. The two covered wagons were dilapidated, too. Gypsies usually have good horses, but those the girls saw feeding in the little glade were mere "crowbaits."

Several low-browed, roughly dressed men sat in a group on the grass playing cards. They were smoking, and one was tipping a black bottle to his lips just as the girls from Milton came near.

"Let's hurry right by, Pearl!" begged Ruth.

Pearl, however, was not as observant as the Corner House girl. She failed to see danger in the situation, or in the looks the disturbed men cast upon the unprotected party of girls. As several of the fellows rose, Pearl called to them:

"Where's your Pythoness! Where is the Queen of the Gypsies? We want our fortunes told."

One man—a tall fellow with a scarred face—turned and shouted something in a strange tongue at the tents. Ruth recognized the language in

which the woman had talked to the dark-faced girl on the train.

And then, the next moment, Ruth caught sight of the face of the very woman in question, peering from between the flaps of one of the dingy tents.

CHAPTER IX

THE SPOONDRIFT BUNGALOW

"I DON'T think these are very nice looking men, do you, Tess?" Dot seriously asked her sister as the party halted before the Gypsy camp.

"Why, Dot!" gasped Tess. "That man *there* is the very fellow who tried to steal Ruth's chickens!"

"Oh—o-o!"

"Yes, he is," whispered the amazed Tess. "He's the young man Tom Jonah chased up on to the henhouse roof."

"Well," said the philosophical Dot, "he can't steal our chickens *here*."

"Just the same I wish Tom Jonah was here with us. I—I'd feel better about meeting him," confessed Tess.

The other girls did not hear this conversation between the two youngest Kenways. Ruth and Agnes, however, were really troubled by the meeting with the Gypsies; the former was, in addition, suspicious of the woman who had been on the train with them.

This strange woman did not come out of the tent. Indeed, almost at once she disappeared,

dropping the curtain. She did not wish to be observed by the girls from Milton.

"Oh, come on!" cried the reckless Pearl. "They'll only ask us a dime each. 'Cross their palms with silver,' you know. And they do tell the *queerest* things sometimes."

"I don't believe we'd better stop this afternoon, Pearl," ventured Ruth, as one of the rough fellows drew nearer to the girls.

"Let the little ladies wait but a short time," said this man. "They will have revealed to them all they wish to know."

He had an ugly leer, and had Pearl looked at him she would have been frightened by his expression. But she was searching her chain-purse for dimes. It did not look to Ruth Kenway as though that purse would last long in the company of these evil fellows.

Now the same tent flap was pushed aside again and into the open hobbled an old crone. She seemed to be a toothless creature, and leaned upon a crutch. Gray strands of coarse hair straggled over her wrinkled forehead. She had a hump on her back—or seemed to have, for she wore a long cloak, the bedraggled tail of which touched the ground.

She hobbled across the lawn toward the girls. Ruth watched her closely for, it seemed, she came more hurriedly than seemed necessary.

A dog—one of the mongrels that infested the camp—ran at her, and the old crone struck at the

creature with her crutch; he ran away yelping. She was plainly more vigorous of arm than one would have believed from her decrepit appearance.

The grinning fellows separated as the old hag came forward. She did not speak to them, but she was muttering to herself.

"Incantations!" whispered Pearl. "Isn't she enough to give you the delicious shudders? Oh!"

Pearl was evidently enjoying the adventure to the full, but some of the girls besides Ruth and Agnes, did not feel so very pleasant. When one of the fellows took hold of Carrie Poole's wrist-watch with a grimy finger and thumb, she screamed.

"Don't fear, little lady," said the tall, grim man, and he struck the officious fellow with his elbow in the ribs. "He means nothing harmful. Here is Zaliska, the Queen of the Romany. She is very old and very wise. She will tell you much for a silver shilling; but she will tell you more for two-bits."

"He means a quarter," said Pearl, explaining. "But a quarter's too much. Show her your palms, girls. This is my treat. I have ten dimes."

The tall man had motioned his fellows back, but they were arranged around the party of girls in such a way that, no matter which way they turned, one of the ruffians was right before them!

"Oh, Ruth! I am frightened!" whispered Agnes in her sister's ear.

"Sh! don't scare the children," Ruth said, her first thought for Tess and Dot.

The old crone hobbled directly to Ruth and put out a brown claw. Ruth extended her own right hand tremblingly. The hag was mumbling something or other, but Ruth could not hear what she said at first, the other girls were chattering so.

Then she noticed that the grip of the old Gypsy was a firm one. The back of her hand seemed wrinkled and puckered; but suddenly Ruth knew that this was the effect of grease paint!

This was a made-up old woman—not a real old woman, at all!

The discovery frightened the Corner House girl almost as much as the rough men frightened her. "Zaliska" was a disguised creature.

She clung to Ruth's hand firmly when the girl would have pulled it away, and now Ruth heard her hiss:

"Get you away from this place. Get you away with your friends—quick. And do not come back at all."

Ruth was shaking with hysterical terror. The creature clung to her hand and mumbled this warning over and over again.

"What's she telling you, Ruth?" demanded the hilarious Pearl.

"Trouble! trouble!" mumbled the supposed

fortune-teller, shaking her head, but accepting the next girl's dime.

Ruth whispered swiftly to Pearl: "Oh! let us get out of here. These men mean to rob us—I am sure."

"They would not dare," began the startled Pearl.

Just then there was a creaking of heavy wheels, and a voice shouting to oxen. The Gypsies glanced swiftly and covertly at one another, falling back farther from the vicinity of the girls.

Indeed, several of them returned to the card game. The fortune-teller mumbled her foolish prophecies quickly. Into the glade, along a wood-path from the thicker timber, came two spans of oxen dragging three great logs. A pleasant-faced young man swung the ox-goad and spoke cheerily to the slow-moving, ponderous animals.

"Let's go at once, Pearl!" begged Ruth. "We'll keep close to this lumberman. Dot and Tess can ride on the logs."

"Come on, girls! I think this old woman is a faker," cried Pearl. "She can't even tell me whether I'm going to marry a blond man, or a brunette!"

"Don't go yet, little ladies," said the tall man, suavely. "Zaliska can tell you much——"

"Let's go, girls!" cried Carrie Poole, snatching her hand away from the supposed old woman.

Ruth and Agnes had already seized their sisters and were hurrying them toward the lumberman.

"Whoa, Buck! Whoa, Bright!" shouted the teamster, cracking the whiplash before the leading span of oxen. "Sh-h! Steady! What's the matter, girls?"

"Won't you take us to the main road where we can get the stage for Pleasant Cove?" cried Ruth.

"Sure, Miss. Going right there. Want to ride?"

"Oh, yes, sir!" cried the Corner House girls.

"That will be great fun!" shouted some of the others. "Come on!"

They clambered all over the logs, that were chained together and swung from the axle of the rear pair of wheels. The Gypsies began gathering around and some of them muttered threateningly, but the lumberman cracked his whip and the oxen started easily.

"Cling on, girls!" advised the driver. "No skylarking up there. Soon have you out to the pike road. And you want to keep away from that Gypsy camp. They are a tough lot—very different from the crowd that camped there last year and the year before. We farmers are getting about ready to run them out, now I tell ye!"

Ruth said nothing—not even to Agnes—about what she had discovered. She had penetrated "Queen Zaliska's" disguise. She believed that

the supposed old crone was the handsome, dark girl whom she had observed so narrowly on the train.

Perhaps nobody but Ruth, of the party of ten girls, really understood that they had been in peril from the Gypsies. *She* believed that, had they not gotten away from the camp as they had, the men would have robbed them.

The Gypsies were afraid of the husky lumberman, and they did not follow the girls. Once on the highway, Pearl declared the auto-stage would be along in ten minutes or so, and they bade the lumberman good-bye with a feeling of perfect safety.

The Gypsies had not dared follow the party. Soon the stage came along, and for ten cents each the girls rode into Pleasant Cove. There were only a few other passengers, and the party from Milton sat on top and had a lot of fun.

Pearl pointed out the byroad that led down to the river beach where the tent colony was set up, but the stage went right past Spoondrift bungalow, and the girls got down and charged that dwelling "like a horde of Huns," Agnes declared.

Uncle Phillip Harrod was at home, and welcomed them kindly. "Help yourselves, girls, and go as far as you like," he said, waving both hands, and retired to a corner of the piazza with his book and a pipe.

The girls took him at his word. They were very busy till nightfall. Then, however, every-

thing was ready for their occupancy of the bungalow, and supper was cooking on the kerosene range.

They had forgotten the Gypsies—all but Ruth. She was bound to be puzzled by the disguised "queen" and wondered secretly what the masquerade meant, and who the beautiful girl was who posed as "Zaliska"?

CHAPTER X

SOME EXCITEMENT

"But *why* 'Spoondrift'?" demanded Lucy. "What does it mean?"

" 'Spoondrift' is the spray from the tops of the waves," explained Pearl. "We think the name is awfully pretty."

"And so is the bungalow—and the Cove," sighed Ruth.

"And we're going to have a scrumptious time here!" declared Agnes.

Tess and Dot were frankly sleepy, and Lucy begged the privilege of seeing them to bed.

"That's real kind of you, I'm sure, Lute," said Agnes.

"Don't you praise her," sniffed Carrie. "I know Lute. She's sleepy, herself. You won't see her downstairs again to-night."

"I don't care," yawned Lucy Poole, following Tess and Dot. "I sleep so slowly that it takes a long time for me to get a good night's rest."

"Well! of all things!" ejaculated Carrie, as her cousin departed, following the two smaller girls. "What do you know about *that?*"

"Almost as stupid as the inhabitants of London," chuckled Agnes.

"What do you mean by that, Ag?" demanded

Ann Presby. "The people of London aren't any more stupid than those of other cities, are they?"

"I don't know," returned Agnes; "but the book says 'the population of London is very dense.'"

"Fine! fine!" cried Carrie Poole, laughing. "Oh! these 'literal' folk. You know, my Grandfather Poole has an awfully bald head. He was telling us once that in some famous battle of the Civil War in which he took part, his head was grazed by a bullet. My little brother Jimmy stared at his head thoughtfully for a minute, and then he said:

"'My, Grandpa, there's not much grazing up there now, is there?'"

These stories began the evening. Everybody had some story or joke to relate, and finally the girls began to guess riddles. Somebody propounded the old one about the wind: "What is it that goes all around the house and yet makes no tracks?" and Agnes had a new answer for it:

"Germs!" she shouted. "You know, Miss Georgiana gave us a lecture about them, and I bet we're just surrounded by deadly bacilli right now."

"Those aren't germs—they're mosquitos, Ag!" laughed Pearl, slapping vigorously at one of the pests. "Pleasant Cove isn't entirely free from them."

"And they are presenting their bills pretty lively, too," yawned Ruth. "The bedrooms are screened. I believe we'd all better seek the haven of bed unless we want to be splotchy to-morrow from mosquito bites."

In the morning the older girls divided the housework between them, and so got it all done in short order. The baggage had come up from the station the evening before, and they unpacked.

Then they set forth to explore the fishing port, as well as the more modern part of Pleasant Cove.

As they brisked along the walk past Mr. Terrence Severn's Overlook House, they spied Trix and her party on the big veranda. The girls hailed each other back and forth; only Trix and the Corner House girls did not speak.

"We can't speak to her if she won't speak to us," said Ruth to Agnes. "Now, never you mind, Aggie. She'll get over her tantrum in time."

The party from Spoondrift bungalow got back in season to get luncheon; after which they rested and then bathed. It was the Corner House girls' first experience of salt water bathing and they all enjoyed it—even Dot.

"It *does* make you suck in your breath awfully hard when the waves lap upon you," she confessed. "But there was the Alice-doll sitting on the shore watching me, and so I couldn't let her see that I was *afraid!*"

Ruth, more than the other girls, aided Pearl

in looking after housekeeping affairs. It was she who discovered the broken lamp in the front hall.

The bungalow was lighted by oil-lamps, and they used candles in the bed chambers; while there was a marvelous "blue-flame" kerosene range in the kitchen.

Not all of the girls understood the handling of kerosene lamps, and Pearl told a funny story about her own little sister who had never seen any lights but gas or electric.

"When she came down here to Uncle Phil's bungalow for the first time, she was all excited about the lamps. She told mamma that 'Uncle Phil had his 'lectricity in a lamp right on the supper table. It's a queer kind of a light, for they fill it with water out of a can.' "

The hanging lamp in the front hall was set inside a melon-shaped globe. Finding that, as Ruth pointed out, it could not be used, Pearl made another trip to the village before teatime and in the local "department store" bought another lamp.

"I am afraid you ought not to use that lamp, Pearl," Ruth said, when she saw that the chimney was not tall enough to stick out of the top of the globe.

"Pooh! why not? Guess it's just as good as the old chimney was," said Pearl.

"Seems to me Mrs. MacCall says that chimneys should always be tall enough to come up

through the globe. I don't know just why——"

"Oh, pshaw!" interrupted Pearl. "It's all right, I fancy."

Neither girl had recourse to "applied physics." Had she done so she could easily have discovered just *why* it was unwise to use a lamp with a short chimney inside such a shaped globe as that hanging in chains in the front hall of the bungalow.

Ruth forgot the matter. It was Pearl herself who lit the hall lamp that evening. As before, they sat on the porch and played games and sang or told stories, all the long, bright evening.

Tess and Dot had gone to bed at half after eight. It was an hour later that Lucy suddenly said:

"I smell smoke."

"It isn't Mr. Harrod," said Ann. "He's gone down to the Casino."

"It isn't tobacco smoke I smell," declared Lucy, springing up.

"Oh, Lute!" shrieked Agnes. "Look at the door!"

A cloud of black, thick smoke was belching out of the front hall upon the veranda. One of the other girls shrieked "Fire!"

Those next few minutes were terribly exciting for all hands at the Spoondrift bungalow. A single glance into the hall showed Ruth Kenway that the hanging lamp had burst, and the place was all ablaze.

There was but one stairway, and the children were in one of the low-ceilinged rooms above. Tess and Dot could only be reached by climbing up the long, sloping roof of the bungalow, and getting in at the chamber window.

While some of the girls ran for water—which was useless in the quantity they could bring from the kitchen tap in pots and pans—and others ran screaming along the street for help, Ruth "shinnied" right up one of the piazza pillars and squirmed out upon the shingled roof.

She tore her dress, and hurt her knees and hands; but she did not think of this havoc at the moment. She got to the window of the room in which her sisters slept, and screamed for Tess and Dot, but in their first sleep the smaller girls were completely "dead to the world."

There was the screen to be reckoned with before the oldest Corner House girl could enter. It was set into the window from the inside, and she could neither lift the window-sash nor stir the screen. So she beat the tough wire in with her fists, and they bled and hurt her dreadfully! Nevertheless, she got through, falling into the room just as the stifling smoke from below began to pour in around the bedroom door.

"Tess! Dot! Hurry up! Get up!" she shrieked, shaking them both.

Tess aroused, whimpering. Ruth seized Dot bodily, flung a blanket around her, and put her

out of the window upon the roof. Then she dragged Tess to the window and made her climb out after her sister.

"Oh, oh!" gasped Tess, alive at last to the cause of the excitement. "Save the Alice-doll, Ruthie. Save Dot's Alice-doll!"

And Ruth actually went back, groping through the gathering smoke, for the doll. With it she scrambled out upon the shingles.

By that time the street was noisy with shouting people. Mr. Harrod came with a fire extinguisher and attacked the flames. Other men came and helped the girls down from the roof.

Agnes had fainted when she realized the danger her sisters were in. Some of the other girls were quite hysterical. Neighbors took them all in for the night.

It was quite an hour before the fire was completely out. Then the Spoondrift bungalow certainly *was* in a mess.

"It will take carpenters and painters a fortnight and more to repair the damage," said Mr. Harrod the next morning. "Luckily none of your guests lost their clothing, Pearl; but you will all have to go to the hotel to finish your visit to Pleasant Cove."

Ruth actually went back, groping through the gathering smoke, for the doll. With it she scrambled out upon the shingles. Page 104

CHAPTER XI

THE LITTLE OLD WOMAN WHO LIVED IN A SHOE

The Overlook House was nearest. Mr. Harrod made arrangements for the girls to go there and occupy several rooms. At least, he presumed he had made that arrangement with Mr. Severn when he left on the forenoon train for Bloomingsburg to arrange his insurance and hire mechanics to at once repair the bungalow.

The Spoondrift cottage was really not fit for occupancy and there seemed nothing else for the girls to do but follow his advice and go over to the Overlook. But Ruth Kenway had her doubts.

After the excitement of the fire, and the general "stir-about" which ensued, Pearl Harrod had quite forgotten that the Corner House girls were not on terms of intimacy with Trix Severn, the hotel keeper's daughter. It probably never entered her good-natured mind that Trix would behave meanly when all hands from the Spoondrift had escaped the peril of the fire.

The girls trooped over to the hotel, after repacking their baggage, to look at the rooms which had been secured for them. Mr. Severn was not there, nor was the clerk on duty. Their schoolmate, Trix, was behind the desk.

"Oh, yes," she said carelessly, "I presume we can find rooms for you. But father doesn't care much to take in people who won't stay the season out—especially at this time of the year. It's a great inconvenience."

"Pooh!" said Pearl, frankly, "I guess your father is running his hotel for money—not for sport. And Uncle Phil is going to pay him for all the accommodation we get."

"Indeed?" returned Trix. "You seem to know a lot about our business, Miss Harrod."

"Don't you put on any of your high and mighty airs with me, Miss!" snapped Pearl. "For they don't go down, let me tell you! Didn't Uncle Phil secure rooms for us?"

"Well—he spoke of your coming here. There is Number 10, and 11, and 14; they're all three double rooms, so you and Ann can have one, Maud and Lulu another, and Carrie and Lucy the third."

"But, goodness gracious! there are ten of us!" cried Pearl. "You know that very well."

"Those three rooms," said Trix, with elaborate carelessness, "are all your uncle provided."

"Why, Uncle Phil must be crazy! Didn't he get a big room for the Kenways?"

"Humph!" said Trix, maliciously. "Are *they* with you, Miss Harrod? Your uncle must have quite overlooked them. All the rooms I know anything about his securing for your party are the three I've mentioned."

"Well, where's your father——"

"He's gone fishing," said Trix, promptly, and with a flash of satisfaction in her eyes. "He won't be back till late to-night."

"Then, where's the clerk?" demanded Pearl, much worried.

"Mr. Cheever doesn't know anything about it. I was here when your uncle made his bargain. Nothing was said about those Corner House girls —so there! There is no room for them here."

"Well! I call that the meanest thing!" began Pearl, but Ruth, who had stood close by, interrupted:

"Don't let it worry you in the least, Pearl. We have plenty of time to find accommodations before night."

"You won't find them here, Miss!" snapped Trix.

"Nothing would make me remain under this roof for a night," said Ruth, indignantly. "My sisters and I have never done you any harm, Trix; quite the contrary, as you would remember had you any gratitude at all. This hotel is not the only place at Pleasant Cove where we can find shelter, I am sure."

"Oh, Ruth! don't go!" begged Pearl. "This mean girl is not telling the truth, I am sure. You'll break up our party," Pearl wailed.

"I couldn't stay here now," the oldest Corner House girl declared. "I am going to secure a tent for us. I am quite sure we will be com-

fortable in one. If other people can stand it under canvas, of course *we* can."

She took Agnes by the hand and they went out of the hotel. Tess and Dot had not come with them, but had been left at the neighbor's where they had all spent the night.

Pearl and the other girls could not very well follow them; they were not so independently situated as the Corner House girls. Ruth had a well filled pocket-book, as well as checks from Mr. Howbridge and an introductory letter to the branch bank at Pleasant Cove.

She had been so used to going ahead, and arranging matters for the whole family, during the past three years, that she was not troubled much by this emergency. She was sorry that the pleasant party had to be broken up, that was all. She was not sure that she and her sisters knew any of the campers along the riverside.

There were two men who supplied tents and outfits for those who wished to live under canvas, and so there were two distinct tent colonies, though they were side by side.

One was called Camp Enterprise, and the other Camp Willowbend. The latter was just at the bend of the river, and there were a few willows on the low bluff back of it.

There were not more than a dozen tents erected in either camp as yet, for it was early in the season. The Corner House girls rode quite a mile

from the hotel to Willowbend Camp and selected a tent that was already erected.

It was a large wall-tent and it was divided in half by a canvas partition that made a bedroom of one end and a living-room of the front part. In the latter was a small sheetiron cookstove, with a pipe that led the smoke outside of the tent. But there was an oilstove, too, and Ruth decided that they would make arrangements for buying most of their food cooked, so as to reduce the details of housekeeping.

Agnes cheered up at once when she saw the tent-cities. And the smaller girls were delighted with the prospect of living under canvas.

There were four cots in the tent, with sheets and blankets, and apologies for pillows; there was matting laid down on the sand, too, in this bedroom part of the tent.

The remainder of the furnishings consisted of four camp-chairs, a plain deal table, a chest of drawers that contained the chinaware and cooking utensils, and a small icebox. This front apartment had a plank floor, made in sections.

It was a rough enough shelter, and the camping arrangements were crude; nevertheless, the Corner House girls saw nothing but fun ahead of them, and they were as busy as bees all that day "getting settled."

There were pleasant people in the other tents of Camp Willowbend, but none of them chanced

to be Milton people. There were several girls of ages corresponding to those of the Corner House girls, and the latter were sure they would find these neighbors good sport.

The Kenways were so busy at noon that they only "took a bite in their fists," as good Mrs. MacCall would have expressed it. Ruth had been wise enough to buy some cooked food in the village before they came over to the camp, but she learned from some of the ladies in the tents that there was a woman in the neighborhood who baked bread to sell, and sometimes cookies and pies.

"You go to see Mrs. Bobster. She's the nicest old lady!" declared one city matron. "Make your arrangements for bread now, Miss Kenway, for after she takes orders for as many as she can well supply, she wouldn't agree to bake another loaf. She has a real New England conscience, and she wouldn't promise to bake a single biscuit more than she knows she can get in her oven."

The directions for finding Mrs. Bobster interested and amused the Corner House girls.

"She is the little old woman who lives in the shoe," laughed their informant. "You can't miss the house, if you go along the beach road toward town. It's just beyond the other camp."

"Oh!" cried Dot, eagerly, "*I* want to see the lady who lives in a shoe. She must have lots of children, for they were a great bother."

"And," said Tess, "do you suppose she *does* whip them all soundly and send them to bed with a piece of bread to eat?"

"We'll discover all that," promised Ruth, and soon after luncheon, having fixed up the tent, and set to rights their things that the expressman had brought over from the Spoondrift bungalow, the four sisters set out to find Mrs. Bobster.

The girls had ridden over from the village along the highroad, on which they had traveled two days before in the auto-stage. This lower, or "beach" road was a much less important thoroughfare. In places it followed the line of the shore so closely that the unusual high tides that had prevailed that spring, had washed a great deal of white sand across the swampgrass and out upon it.

So, in places, the girls plodded through sand over their shoe tops. "Might as well go barefooted," declared Agnes, sitting down for the third time to take off her oxfords and shake out the sand.

"You'd find it pretty different, if you tried it," laughed Ruth. "This sand is hot."

"It does seem as though you slipped back half a step each time you tried to go forward," said Tess, seriously. "Aren't we ever going to get there, Ruth?"

"Oh!" cried Dot, suddenly, "isn't that a giraffe? And there's a camel!"

"For goodness' sake!" gasped Agnes, plung-

ing to her feet, and hopping along after her sisters, trying to get on her left shoe. "Is this the African desert?"

"It looks like it," said Ruth, herself amazed.

"And it's hot enough," grumbled Agnes. "Oh! I see! it's a wrecked carousel."

There were decrepit lions and tigers, too; the rain-washed and broken animals were the remains of a carousel, the machinery of which had been taken away. Once somebody had tried to finance a small pleasure resort between the real village of Pleasant Cove and the two tent colonies, but it had been unsuccessful.

The wreck of a "shoot the chutes," the carousel, a dancing pavilion and a short boardwalk with adjacent stands, had been abandoned by the unfortunate promoters. There was a tower—now a "leaning" tower; broken-down swings, an abandoned moving picture palace; and back from the rest of the wreckage, several hundred yards from the sandy shore, the girls saw a rusty looking frame structure, shaped like a shoe, with a flagstaff sticking out of the roof.

"There it is!" cried Tess, eagerly. "And it *does* look like a shoe."

Originally the house had been a tiny brown cottage set in the midst of a garden. The fence surrounding the place was still well kept. The second story of the cottage had been transformed into the semblance of a congress-gaiter, with windows in the sides and front. It looked as though

that huge shoe had been carefully placed upon the rafters of the first floor rooms of the cottage.

"What a funny looking place!" exclaimed Agnes. "Did you ever see the like, Ruth? I wonder if Mrs. Bobster is as funny as her house."

At that moment a figure bobbed up among the beanpoles in the garden, and the girls saw that it was a little woman in a calico sunbonnet. Her face was very small and hard and rosy—like a well-shined Baldwin apple. She had twinkling blue eyes, as sharp as file-points.

"Shoo!" exclaimed the little woman. "Shoo, Agamemnon! Git aout o' them pea-vines like I told you!"

For a moment the Corner House girls did not see Agamemnon; they could not imagine who he was.

"Shoo, I tell ye!" exclaimed the little old woman who lived in a shoe, and she struck out with the short-handled hoe she was using.

There was a squawk, and out leaped, with awkward stride, a long legged rooster—of what "persuasion" it was impossible to tell, for he was swathed from neck to spurs in a wonderful garment which had undoubtedly been made out of a red flannel undershirt!

Two or three bedraggled tail-feathers appeared at the aperture in the back of this garment; otherwise Agamemnon seemed to be quite featherless. And when, clear of his mistress' reach, he flapped

his almost naked wings and crowed, he was the most comical looking object the Corner House girls had ever seen.

CHAPTER XII

A PICNIC WITH AGAMEMNON

"You see, gals, Agamemnon's been the most unlucky bird that ever was hatched," said the little old woman, coming across the tiny lawn to the fence where the Corner House girls were staring, round-eyed, at the strange apparition of a rooster in a red-flannel sleeping-suit.

"But he's the pluckiest! Yes, ma'am! He was only a pindling critter when he pipped the shell, an' the vi-cis-*si*-tudes that bird's been through since he fust scratched would ha' made a human lay right down and die.

"The other chickens never would let him raise a pin-feather ter cover his nakedness; they picked on him suthin' *awful.* I shet him up till his wings and tail growed, an' a rat got in an' gnawed the feathers right off him in one night; but Agamemnon picked and clawed so't the old rat didn't bleed him much.

"And now here, lately, a neighbor got a half-breed game rooster, an' thet pesky fightin' bird got down here an' sasses Agamemnon on his own premises.

"Ag wouldn't stand for that," said the old

lady, her blue eyes fairly crackling. "He sailed right inter that game chicken—an' Neighbor Lincoln et his rooster the nex' Sunday for dinner. 'Twas all he could do with the critter after Agamemnon got through with him.

"But that game rooster had tore ev'ry *important* feather off'n poor Agamemnon's carcass. I had to do suthin'. 'Twarn't decent for him to go 'round bare. So I made him that smock out of one o' poor Eddie's old shirts. And there ye be!" she finished breathlessly, smiling broadly upon the interested Corner House girls.

"I guess you are Mrs. Bobster?" asked Ruth, smiling in return.

"Are you *really* the—the lady who lives in the shoe?" asked Dot, round-eyed.

"That's what they call me, pet," said Mrs. Bobster, smiling at the smallest Kenway. "I'm the only little old woman who lives in *this* shoe. Poor Eddie thought we'd make a mint of money if we built over the top of our house like that, and I sold gingercakes and sweeties to the children who came down here to the beach. Eddie was allus mighty smart in thinkin' up schemes for me to make money. But the Beach Company went up in smoke, as the sayin' is; so we didn't make our fortun' after all."

She laughed. Indeed, this little, apple-faced old lady was almost always laughing, it seemed.

"Poor Eddie!" she added. "I guess the Beach Company failin' took about all the tuck

out o' him. He said himself it was the last straw on the camel's back. He jest settled right down inter his chair, like; and he didn't last that winter out. He was allus weakly, Eddie was."

The Corner House girls knew she must be speaking of her husband. So now she was all alone in the house that had such a grotesque upper story.

"No. There ain't no children here—only them that comes in to see me," Mrs. Bobster said in answer to a question from Tess. "We never did have no children; but we allus loved 'em."

Meanwhile she had opened the gate and invited the Corner House girls into the yard. There was an arbor which was already shaded by quick-growing vines. The little kitchen garden, with its border of gooseberries and currants, was as neat as it could be.

"I gotter cow of my own out back, and hens, too. I make a bare livin' in winter, and put frills onto it in summer," and the old lady laughed. "These folks from the city that come livin' in tents here, like my bread and cookies."

"That is what we have come to arrange for, Mrs. Bobster," said Ruth.

"I dunno. Most all I can comferbly bake three times a week, is bespoke," said the little old woman who lived in a shoe. "How many is there in your fam'bly, Miss?"

When she heard that there were just four of them—these girls alone—and that they were to

live by themselves in a tent, she grew greatly interested.

"Surely I'll bake for you—and cookies, too. Maybe a fruit pie oncet in a while—'specially if you'll go over beyond the bend when berries is ripe and pick 'em yourself. And you gals a-livin' all alone? Sho! I'd think you'd be scaret to death."

"Why, no!" said Ruth. "Why should we?"

"After dark," said the old woman, shaking her hand.

"Who would hurt us?" asked the Corner House girl in wonder.

"Can't most always sometimes tell," said the old woman, shaking her head.

"But *you* live here alone?"

"No," she said, quickly. "Not after dark. I ain't never alone. Oh, no!"

She spoke as though she were afraid Ruth might not believe her, and repeated the denial several times.

Tess and Dot were very anxious to go upstairs and see the rooms in the "shoe," and they made the request to Ruth in an audible whisper.

"For sure!" cried Mrs. Bobster. "All the children that come here want to go upstairs. If I had 'em of my own, that's where I'd put 'em all to bed after I'd fed 'em bread and 'whipped 'em all soundly,' " and she laughed.

"I don't believe you'd have whipped the children, if you'd been the really truly little old

woman that lived in the shoe," quoth Dot, putting a confiding hand into the apple-faced lady's hard palm.

"I bet *you* wouldn't have had to be whipped," laughed Mrs. Bobster, leading Dot away, with Tess following.

Later the hostess of the shoe-house brought out a pitcher of milk and glasses with a heaping plate of ginger cookies—the old-fashioned kind that just *melt* on your tongue!

"Sho!" she said, when Ruth praised them. "It's easy enough to make good merlasses cookies. But ye don't wanter have no conscience when it comes to butter—no, indeed!"

Agamemnon came to the feast. In his ridiculous red flannel suit he waddled up to his mistress and pecked crumbs off her lap when she sat down on the bench in the arbor.

"He looks just like a person ready to go in swimming," chuckled Agnes. "It's a red bathing suit."

"That's one thing Agamemnon can't stand. He don't like water," said Mrs. Bobster. "But if I let him out at low tide he'll beau a flock of hens right down to the clamflats. But now, poor thing! they won't go with him."

"Who—the hens?" asked Ruth, wonderingly.

"Yes. They don't think he looks jest right, I s'pose. If he chassés up to one of my old biddies, she tries to tear that flannel suit right off'n him. It's hard on poor Agamemnon; but until

his feathers start to grow good again, I don't dare have him go without it. He'd git sunburned like a brick, in the fust place."

This tickled Agnes so that she almost fell off the bench.

"But I should think the red flannel would tickle him awfully," murmured Tess, quite seriously disturbed over the plight of the rooster.

"Sho! keeps away rheumatics. So poor Eddie allus said," declared the widow. "That's why he wore red flannel for forty year—and he never had a mite of rheumatism. Agamemnon ought to be satisfied he's alive, after all he's been through."

It was really very funny to see the rooster strutting about the yard in what Agnes called his red bathing suit.

The Corner House girls remained for some time with Mrs. Bobster. When they went back to the camp at the bend they carried their first supply of bread and cookies.

They arrived at their tent to find a wagonette Pearl had hired in the port, and all the other girls who had been at the Spoondrift bungalow had come visiting.

The crowd was delighted with the way Ruth and her sisters were situated. It looked as though to live under canvas would be great fun indeed.

"Wish I'd spoken to Uncle Phil about it, and gotten him to hire tents instead of putting us up

at that old hotel," declared Pearl. "And do you know, girls, that Trix Severn told a story?"

"I didn't suppose she'd be above being untruthful," Ruth said, rather indignantly.

"And you're quite right. We found out that her father set aside a big, double-bedded room for you four girls. Trix says she did not know anything about it. But of course Uncle Phil would not have forgotten you."

"Never mind," said Agnes. "I'm glad she acted so. We're a whole lot better off here."

"I believe you!" said Carrie Poole.

"You going to have Rosa Wildwood here in the tent with you when she comes?" asked Ann Presby.

"I'm afraid she ought to have a better place," said Ruth. "And I believe I know just where she would get the attention—and food—that she needs," and the oldest Corner House girl told the crowd about Mrs. Bobster—the little old lady who lived in a shoe.

"If I can get the dear old thing to take Rosa to board, I know she'll give her just what she needs—good food, plenty of it, well cooked, and Rosa will be in a quiet place where she can rest all she wants to," said Ruth.

She had no idea at the time of the strange adventure that would arise out of this plan of hers to bring Rosa Wildwood to stay for a part of the summer with the little old woman who lived in a shoe.

CHAPTER XIII

THE NIGHT OF THE BIG WIND

"RUTHIE! there's a man here wants to sell you a boat."

"Ruthie! there's another man wants to sell an elephant—and it's *so* cute!"

"For the land's sake!" gasped Ruth, throwing down a sputtering pen, where she was writing on the chest of drawers in the tent. "*How* can a body write? And an elephant, no less!"

She rushed out to see Dot's elephant, as that seemed more important than Tess' announcement that a man had merely a boat for sale. Dot's man was a gangling young fellow with a covered basket from which he was selling sugar cakes made into fancy shapes. So Dot had her elephant for the Alice-doll (almost everything that appealed to Dot was bought for that pampered child of hers!) and was appeased.

But the man with the boat was a different matter. He proved to be a boat owner and he wanted to hire one of his craft to the Corner House girls by the week. Agnes was just crazy (so she said) to add rowing to her accomplishments, and Ruth thought it would be a good thing herself.

The boat was a safe, cedar craft, with two pairs

of light oars and a portable kerosene engine and propeller to use if the girls got tired of rowing. Ruth made the bargain after thoroughly looking over the boat, which had had only one season's use.

There was a chain and padlock for mooring it to a post at the edge of the water just below the tent.

The older girls had already learned to swim in the school gymnasium at Milton. Milton was pretty well up to date in its school arrangements.

Tess had been taught to "strike out" and could be left safely to paddle by herself in shallow water while Ruth and Agnes taught little Dot.

The latter refused to own to any fear of the water. Up here in the river the waves were seldom of any consequence, and of course on stormy days the girls would not go bathing at all.

Others of the Willowbend campers had rowboats for the season; and some even owned their own motorboats. The girls were well advised regarding fishing-tackle and the like. Crabbing was a favorite sport just then, for several small creeks emptied into the river nearby and soft-shell crabs and shedders were plentiful.

"I'd be afraid of these crabs if their teeth were hard," Dot declared, for she insisted that the "pincers" of the crustaceans were teeth.

"They are dreadfully *squirmy,* anyway," sighed Tess. "Just like spiders. And yet, we eat them!"

"But—but I always shut my eyes when I eat them; just as I do when I swallow raw oysters," confessed Dot. "They taste so much better than they look!"

Having the boat, the Corner House girls rowed to the village for their supplies and to visit their friends. They did not go to the Overlook House; but Pearl Harrod and her party were at the burned bungalow almost all day. They always bathed there, and the Corner House girls went down to bathe with them. The beach was better there than at the camp.

It was Monday when Ruth Kenway and her sisters were established in their tent. On Thursday of that week they rowed over to Spoondrift bungalow in the morning. Pearl greeted them before they got ashore with:

"Oh, Ruth! The funniest thing has happened. You'd never guess."

"Trix Severn has the mumps!" exclaimed Agnes. "I knew she was all swelled up."

"Not as good as *that*," laughed Pearl. "But worse may happen to that girl than mumps. However, it's nothing to do with Trix."

"What is it?" asked Ruth, calmly. "I'm not a good guesser, Pearl."

"You remember those Gypsies?"

"That are camped up in the woods?"

"Yes."

"If they *are* Gypsies," said Ruth, doubtfully.

"Of course they are!" cried Pearl. "Well, they've been around here looking for you."

"For goodness' sake!" gasped Agnes. "What for?"

Ruth herself looked startled. But Pearl began to laugh again.

"At least, that queer old woman has been asking for you," she explained.

"Zaliska!" exclaimed Ruth, although she was very sure that was not the person's name. Of course the name was part of the strange girl's masquerade.

"It was this morning," Pearl went on to say. "We didn't see many of the women of the tribe when we came past that camp last week. But a number of them came down into the village this morning—selling baskets and telling fortunes from door to door. We saw them over by the hotel—didn't we, girls?"

"Yes. I bought a basket from one of them," admitted Carrie Poole.

"But when we came up here to the bungalow," pursued Pearl, "one of the men working here asked me if I'd seen 'my friend, the Gypsy queen'? So, I said 'No,' of course.

"Then he told me that that Zaliska had asked him where the girl was who was called Ruth Kenway. He told her that after the bungalow got afire, all the girls went to the hotel."

"Then she'll never find you there, Ruth," interposed Agnes, with satisfaction.

Ruth was not sure that she did not wish the supposed Gypsy queen to find her. She knew that "Zaliska" was really the very pretty, dark-skinned girl whom she had been so much interested in on the train coming down from Milton.

And that strange girl was interested in Rosa Wildwood. Of that Ruth was as sure as she could be.

"Maybe she'll follow you up to the camp," said Lucy Poole. "I'd be afraid to live all alone in that tent if I were you girls."

"Pooh!" exclaimed Agnes. "What's going to hurt us?"

"The crabs might come up the beach at night and pinch your toes," laughed Maud Everts.

"I don't know," Pearl said, seriously. "I wouldn't want those Gyps interested in *me.*"

"Now you are trying to frighten us," laughed Ruth. "We have plenty of neighbors. Don't you come up there and try to play tricks on us in the tent. You might get hurt."

"Bet she has a gatling gun," chuckled Carrie Poole.

"I'm going to have something better than that," declared Ruth, smiling. But she refused to tell them *what.*

Ruth remembered that the little old woman who lived in a shoe had spoken of being afraid, too; so the oldest Corner House girl made her plans accordingly, but kept them to herself.

After their bath the sisters dressed in the Har-

rod tent that had been pitched on the lawn behind the bungalow, and then went on to the village. Ruth and Agnes rowed very nicely, for the former, at least, had had some practise at this sport before coming to Pleasant Cove.

They tied the painter of their boat to a ring in one of the wharf stringers, and went "up town" to the stores. The village of Pleasant Cove was never a bustling business center. There were but few people on the main street, and most of those were visitors.

"There are two of those Gypsy women, Ruth!" hissed Agnes in her sister's ear, as they came out of a store.

Ruth looked up to see the woman who had been in the train, and another. They were both humbly dressed, but in gay colors. Ruth looked up and down the street for the disguised figure of the young girl, but *she* was not in sight.

"My goodness, Ruth!" said Agnes, "what do you suppose that old hag of a Gypsy wants you for?"

"She isn't——" began Ruth. Then she thought better of taking Agnes into her confidence just then and did not finish her impulsively begun speech, but said:

"We won't bother about it. She probably won't find us up at Willowbend Camp."

"I should hope *not!*" cried Agnes. "I don't want to get any better acquainted with those Gyps."

The matter, however, caused Ruth to think more particularly of Rosa Wildwood. She had not yet found a boarding place for the Southern girl, and Rosa was to come down to Pleasant Cove the next Monday.

Ruth wanted to see Mrs. Bobster, and she did so that very afternoon. On their way back to the camp they tied the boat up at the foot of the wrecked pleasure park and walked up the broken boardwalk to the shoe-house.

"Here's your bread, girls—warm from the oven," said the brisk little woman. "And if you want a pan of seed cookies——"

"Oh! don't we, just!" sighed Agnes.

The girls sat down to eat some of the delicacies right then and there, and Mrs. Bobster brought a pitcher of cool milk from the well-curb. Ruth at once opened the subject of getting board for Rosa with the little old woman who lived in a shoe.

"Wal, I re'lly don't know what ter say to ye," declared Mrs. Bobster. "I ain't never kalkerlated ter run a boardin' house——

"But one young lady! I dunno. They wanted me to take old Mr. Kendricks ter board last winter; the town selectmen did. But I told 'em 'No.' I warn't runnin' a boardin' house—nor yet the poorfarm."

"Poorfarm?" questioned Ruth, puzzled by the reference.

"Yep. Ye see, there ain't been no town poor

here in Pleasant Cove for a number o' years. Last winter old Mr. Kendricks see fit to let the town board him. He's spry enough to go clammin' in the summer; an' he kin steer a boat when his rheumatics ain't so bad. But winters is gittin' hard on him.

"It didn't seem good jedgment," Mrs. Bobster said, reflectively, "to open the poorfarm jest for *him*. B'sides, they'd got the old farm let to good advantage for another year to Silas Holcomb. So they come to me.

"Now, Mr. Kendricks is as nice an old man as ever you'd wish ter see," pursued Mrs. Bobster. "He comes of good folks—jest as good as my poor Eddie's folks.

"The town selectmen had consid'rable trouble gettin' Mr. Kendricks took, 'count o' his being so pertic'lar. Yeast bread seemed ter be his chief objection. He couldn't make up his mind to it on account of havin' had sour milk biscuit all his life; but finally, after I'd said 'No,' they got Mis' Ann 'Liza Cobbles to agree to give him hot bread three times a day like he was used to.

"But, lawsy me! She ain't a com-*plete* cook —no, indeed! Mr. Kendricks said her cookin' warn't up to the mark, an' if he has to go on the town this comin' winter he shouldn't go to Mis' Cobbles.

"The selectmen may be driv' to open the poorfarm ag'in, an' to gittin' somebody ter do for Mr. Kendricks proper.

"Maybe it's a sort of lesson to the folks of Pleasant Cove," sighed Mrs. Bobster, "for bein' sort o' proud-like through reason of not havin' no town poor for endurin' of ten years. I view it that way myself.

"Mr. Kendricks says he feels as if he was meant ter be a notice to 'em; ter be ready an' waitin' ter help people in a proper way; not to be boardin' of 'em 'round where they might git dyspepsia fastened on 'em through eatin' of unproper food."

Agnes was giggling; but Ruth managed to get the talkative old lady back into the track she wanted her in. The Corner House girl expatiated upon how little trouble Rosa would be, and what a nice girl she was.

"Well!" said Mrs. Bobster, "I might try her. You offer awful temptin' money, Miss. And poor Eddie allus said I'd do anything for money!"

It had been fortunate for the deceased Mr. Bobster, as Ruth had learned, that his wife *had* been willing to earn money in any honest way; for Mr. Bobster himself seldom had done a day's work after his marriage to the brisk little woman.

So the matter of Rosa Wildwood's board and lodging was arranged, and the Kenways went back to their boat. Evening was approaching, and with it dark clouds had rolled up from the horizon, threatening a bad night.

Ruth and Agnes found a head wind to contend

with when they pushed off the cedar boat. Ruth had learned to run the little motor propeller, and she started it at once. Otherwise they would have a hard time pulling up to Willowbend Camp.

During the week there were few men at the tent colonies. On Saturdays and Sundays the husbands and fathers were present in force; but now there was not a handful of adult males in either the Enterprise or Willowbend encampments.

The Corner House girls were helped ashore, however, and they hauled their boat clear up to the front of their tent. There was quite a swell on, and the waves ran far up the beach, hissing and spattering spray into the air. The wind swept this spray against the tents in gusts, like rain.

But there was no rain—only wind. The black clouds threatened, but there was no downpour. There was no such thing as having a coal fire, however; the wind blew right down the stack and filled the tent with choking smoke.

They lit a lantern and ate a cold supper. The flaps of the tent were laced down, for they had been warned against letting the wind get under. Now and then, however, a chill draught blew over them and the partition creaked.

"It's just like a storm at sea," said Agnes, rather fearfully, yet enjoying the novel sensation. "We might as well be on a sailing ship."

"Not much!" exclaimed Ruth. "At least, we're on an even keel."

They agreed to go to bed early. Lying in the cots, well covered with the blankets, seemed the safest place on such a night. There was no shouting back and forth from tent to tent, and no visiting.

Lights went out early. The wind shrieked in the treetops back from the shore, and in the lulls the girls could hear the breakers booming on the rocks outside the cove.

Tess and Dot went to sleep—tired with the day's activities. Not so the older girls. They lay and listened, and shivered as the booming voice of the wind grew in volume, and the water seemed to drive farther and farther up the beaches.

Forever after, this night was known at Pleasant Cove as "the night of the big wind." But as yet it had only begun and the Corner House girls had no idea of what was in store for them.

CHAPTER XIV

AN IMPORTANT ARRIVAL

Agnes *did* fall asleep; but Ruth only dozed, if she closed her eyes at all. The rumble of the storm shook the nerves of the oldest Corner House girl—and no wonder!

Ruth felt the weight of responsibility for her sisters' safety. If anything happened while they were under canvas she knew that she would be blamed.

Sometimes the spray swept in from the river and spattered on the canvas like a drenching shower. The walls of the tent shook. She heard many sounds without that she could not explain —and some of these sounds frightened her.

Suppose the tent should blow down? The way the wind sometimes shook it reminded Ruth of a dog shaking a bit of rag.

Then, when the wind held its breath for a moment, the roaring of the sea in the distance was a savage sound to which the girl's ears were not attuned.

She had left the lantern lit and it swung from a rope tied to the ridgepole of the tent, and beyond the half partition of canvas. Its flickering

light cast weird shadows upon the canvas roof.

Now and then the spray beat against the front of the tent, while the roof shook and shivered as though determined to tear away from the walls. Ruth wished she had gone all around the tent before dark to make sure the pegs were driven well into the sand.

Occasionally children cried shrilly, for the noise of the elements frightened them; Ruth was thankful that Tess and Dot slept on.

She slept herself at last; how long she did not know, for when she awoke she was too greatly frightened to look at her watch. The wind seemed suddenly to have increased. It seemed struggling to tear the tent up by the roots!

And as the canvas shook, and swelled, and strove to burst its fastenings, there came a sudden snap on one side and one of the pegs flew high in the air at the end of its rope, coming down *slap* on the roof of the tent!

"The peg has pulled out!" gasped Ruth, sitting up in her cot and throwing off the blanket.

The canvas was straining and bellying fearfully at the point where the peg had drawn. It was likely to draw the pegs on either side. Ruth very well knew that if a broad enough opening was made for the wind to get under, the tent would be torn from its fastenings.

She hopped out upon the matting and shook Agnes by the shoulder.

"Get up! Get up, Ag!" she called, breathlessly. "Help me."

She ran to the front of the tent for the maul—a long-handled, heavy-headed croquet-mallet. When she returned with it, Agnes was trying to rub her eyes open.

"Come quick, Ag! We'll be blown away," declared Ruth.

"I—I——What'll we do?" whimpered Agnes.

"We must hold the tent down. Come on! Get into your mackintosh. I'll get the lantern."

Around the upright pole in the sleeping part of the tent were hung the girls' outer garments. Ruth got into her own raincoat and buttoned it to her ankles. She left Agnes struggling with hers while she ran to unhang the lantern. She knew the night must be as black as a pocket outside.

"Wha—what you going to do?" stuttered Agnes.

"Drive the pegs in deeper. One of them pulled out."

"Oh, dear! *Can* we?"

"I guess we'll have to, if we don't want to loose our tent. Hear that wind?"

"It—it sounds like cannon roaring."

"Come on!"

"But that isn't the front flap——"

"Think I'm going to unlace that front flap when the wind's blowing right into it?"

"Can't we get out yonder, where the peg has been pulled?"

"But how'll we get in again when all the stakes are driven down hard?" snapped Ruth, beginning to unlace the flaps of the rear wall of the tent.

"Oh! oh!" moaned Agnes. "Hear that wind?"

"I wouldn't care if it only *hollered,*" gasped Ruth. "It's what it will do if it ever gets under this tent, that troubles me!"

She unlaced the flaps only a little way. "Come along with that lantern, Ag. We've got to crawl under."

" 'Get down and get under,' " giggled Agnes, hysterically.

But she brought the lantern and followed Ruth out of the tent, on hands and knees. When they stood up and tried to go around to that side of the tent where the peg had pulled out, the wind almost knocked them down.

"And how the sleet cuts!" gasped Agnes, her arm across her eyes for protection.

"It's sand," explained Ruth. "I thought it was spray from the river. But a good deal of it is sand—just like a sand-storm in the desert."

"Well!" grumbled Agnes, "I hope it's killing a lot of those sandfleas that bother us so. I don't see how they can live and be blown about this way."

Ruth tackled the first post at the corner and

beat it down as hard as she could, Agnes holding the lantern so that the older girl could see where to strike.

They went from one peg to the next, taking each in rotation. And when they reached the one that had pulled out entirely, Ruth drove that into the ground just as far as it would go.

Strangely enough, throughout all this business, Tess and Dot did not awake. Ruth went clear around the tent, driving the stakes. The wind howled; the sand and spray blew; and the voices of the Night and of the Storm seemed fairly to yell at them. Still the smaller Corner House girls slept through it all. Ruth and Agnes crept back into the tent and laced the flaps down in safety.

A little later, before either of them fell asleep again, they heard shouting and confusion at a distance. In the morning they learned that two of the tents in the Enterprise Camp had blown down.

The shore was strewn with wreckage, too, when daybreak came; but the wind seemed to have blown itself out. Many small craft had come ashore, and some were damaged. It was not often that the summer visitors at Pleasant Cove saw any such gale as this had been.

Everything was all right with the Corner House girls, and Ruth decided they would stick to the tent, in spite of the fact that some of the

camping families were frightened away from the tent colonies by this disgraceful exhibition of Mr. Wind!

The smaller Kenways, as well as the bigger girls, were enjoying the out-of-door life immensely. They were already as brown as berries. They ran all day, bare-headed and bare-legged, on the sands. It was plain to be seen that the change from Milton to Pleasant Cove was doing all the Corner House girls a world of good.

And during the extremely pleasant days that immediately followed the night of the big wind, many new colonists came to the tents. Two big tents were erected in the Willowbend Camp, for Joe Eldred and *his* friends—and that included, of course, Neale O'Neil. But the Milton boys would not arrive until the next week.

On Monday afternoon the Corner House girls walked down to the railroad station to greet Rosa Wildwood. It had been a very hot day in town and it was really hot at Pleasant Cove, as well.

"Oh! you poor thing!" gasped Ruth, receiving Rosa in her strong arms as she stumbled off the car steps with her bag.

"I'm as thin as the last run of shad, am I not?" asked Rosa, laughing. "That train was *awful!* I am baked. It's never like this down South. The air is so much dryer there; there isn't this humidity. Oh!"

"Well, you're here all right now, Rosa," cried Ruth. "We have a nice, easy carriage for you

to ride in. And the *dearest* place for you to live!"

"And scrumptious eating, Rose," added Agnes.

"With the little old woman who lives in a shoe," declared Tess, eager to add her bit of information.

Dot's finger had strayed to the corner of her mouth, as she stared. For she had never met Rosa before, and she was naturally rather a bashful child.

"Now!" cried Ruth, again. "Where is he?"

"Who?" demanded Agnes, staring all about. "Neale didn't come, did he?"

"Oh, he's up in the baggage-car ahead," said Rosa, laughing.

"You sit right down here till I get him," Ruth commanded.

"Here's the check," Rosa said, and to the amazement of the other Corner House girls Ruth ran right away toward the head of the train with the baggage check, and without saying another word.

There were two baggage cars on the long train and from the open door of the first one the man was throwing trunks and bags onto the big wheel-truck.

So Ruth ran on to the other car. The side-door was wheeled back just as she arrived, and a glad bark welcomed her appearance.

Tom Jonah stood in the doorway, straining at his leash held in the hands of the baggageman.

His tongue lolled out on his chest like a red necktie, and he was laughing just as plainly as ever a dog *did* laugh.

"I see he knows you, Miss," said the man. "You don't have to prove property. He sure is glad to see you," and he accepted the check.

"No gladder than I am to see him," said Ruth. "Let him jump down, please."

She caught the leather strap as the baggageman tossed it toward her, and Tom Jonah bounded about her in an ecstasy of delight.

"Down, sir!" she commanded. "Now, Tom Jonah, come and see the girls. But behave."

He barked loudly, but trotted along beside her most sedately. Tess and Dot had heard him, and deserting Rosa and Agnes, they came flying up the platform to meet Ruth and the big dog.

The two younger Corner House girls hugged Tom Jonah, and he licked their hands in greeting. Agnes was as extravagantly glad to see him as were the others.

"How did you come to send for him, Ruthie?" Agnes cried.

"I thought we might need a chaperon at the tent," laughed Ruth.

"The Gyps!" exclaimed Agnes, under her breath. "Let them come now, if they want to. You're a smart girl, Ruthie."

"Sh!" commanded the older sister. "Don't let the children hear."

They helped Rosa into the wagonette and then

climbed in after her. Ruth had taken off Tom Jonah's leash and the good old dog trotted after the carriage as it rolled through Main Street and out upon the Shore Road toward the tent colonies.

Rosa brought all the news of home to the Corner House girls and many messages from Mrs. MacCall and Uncle Rufus. Of course, they could expect no word from Aunt Sarah, for it was not her way to be sympathetic or show any deep interest in what her adopted nieces were doing.

The girls from the old Corner House might have been a little homesick had there not been so much to take up their attention each hour at Pleasant Cove.

They brought Rosa to the little old woman who lived in a shoe, and the moment Mrs. Bobster saw how weak and white she was her sympathy went out to her.

"Tut, tut, tut!" she said, clucking almost as loudly as Agamemnon himself. "We'll soon fix you up, my dear. If you stay long enough here at the beach, you'll be as brown and strong as these other gals."

Rosa put her arm about Ruth's neck when the Corner House girls were about to leave.

"This is a heavenly place, Ruth Kenway, and you are an angel for bringing me down heah. I don't know what greater thing anybody could do fo' me—and you aren't even kin!"

"Don't bother, Rosa. I haven't done much——"

"There's nothing in the world—but one thing —that could make me happier."

Ruth looked at her curiously, and Rosa added:

"To find June. I hope to find her some day—yes, I do."

"And suppose I should help you do *that?*" laughed the oldest Corner House girl.

CHAPTER XV

TWO GIRLS IN A BOAT—TO SAY NOTHING OF THE DOG!

"Oh, Dot! do come here. Did you ever see such a funny thing in all your life?"

Tess Kenway was just as earnest as though the discovery she had made was really of great moment. The two bare-legged girls were on the sands below the tent colony of Willowbend, and the tide was out.

The receding waves had just left this wet flat bare. Here and there the sand still dimpled to the heave of the tide, and little rivers of water ran into the hollows and out again.

"What is the matter, Tess?" asked Dot, wonderingly.

"See!"

Tess pointed down at her feet—where the drab, wet sand showed lighter-colored under the pressure of her weight.

"What is it?" gasped the amazed Dot.

There was a tiny round hole in the sand—just like an ant hole, only there was no "hill" thrown up about it. As Tess tip-tilted on her toes to bring more pressure to bear near the orifice in the sand, a little fountain of water spurted into

the air—shot as though from a fairy gun buried in the sand.

"Goodness!" gasped Dot again. "What *is* that?"

"That's what I say," responded Tess. "Did you ever see the like?"

"Oh! here's another," cried Dorothy, who chanced to step near a similar vent. "See it squirt, Tess! See it squirt!"

"What kind of a creature do you suppose can be down there?" asked the bigger girl.

"It—it can't be anything very big," suggested Dot. "At least, it must be awfully narrow to get down through the little hole, and pull itself 'way out of sight."

This suggestion certainly opened a puzzling vista of possibilities to the minds of both inland-bred girls. What sort of an animal could possibly crawl into such a small aperture—and yet throw such a comparatively powerful stream of water into the air?

They found several more of the little air-holes. Whenever they stamped upon the sand beside one, up would spring the fountain!

"Just like the books say a whale squirts water through its nose," declared Tess, who had rather a rough-and-ready knowledge of some facts of natural history.

A man with a basket on his arm and a four-pronged, short-handled rake in his hand, was

working his way across the flats; sometimes stooping and digging quickly with his rake, when he would pick something up and toss it into his basket.

He drew near to two Corner House girls, and Dot whispered to Tess:

"Do you suppose he'd know what these holes are for? You ask him, Tess."

"And he's digging out something, himself. Do you suppose he's collecting clams? Ruth says clams grow here on the shore and folks dig them," Tess replied.

"Let's ask about the holes," determined Dot, who was persistent whether the cause was good or bad.

The two girls approached the clam-digger, hand in hand. Dot hugged tight in the crook of one arm her Alice-doll.

"Please, sir," Tess ventured, "will you tell us what grows down under this sand and squirts water up at us through such a teeny, weeny hole?"

The man was a very weather-beaten looking person, with his shirt open at the neck displaying a brawny chest. He smiled down upon the girls.

"How's that, shipmet?" he asked, in a very husky voice. "Show me them same holes."

The sisters led the way, and the very saltish man followed. It was not until then that Tess and Dot noticed that one of his legs was of wood, and he stumped along in a most awkward manner.

"Hel-*lo!*" growled the man, seeing the apertures in the sand. "Them's clams, an' jest what I'm arter. By your lief——"

He struck the rake down into the sand just beyond one of the holes and dug quickly for half a minute. Then he tossed out of the hole he had dug a nice, fat clam.

"There he be, shipmets," declared the clam-digger, who probably had a habit of addressing everybody as "shipmate."

"Oh—but—did *he* squirt the water up at us, sir?" gasped Dot.

The wooden-legged man grinned again and seized the clam between a firm finger and thumb. When he pinched it, the bivalve squirted through its snout a fine spray.

"Oh, mercy!" exclaimed Tess, drawing back.

"But—but *how* did he get down into the sand and only leave such a tiny hole behind him?" demanded Dot, bent upon getting information.

"Ah, shipmet! there ye have it. I ain't a l'arned man. I ain't never been to school. I went ter sea all my days till I got this here leg shot off me and had to take to wearin' a timber-toe. I couldn't tell ye, shipmets, how a clam does go down his hole an' yet pulls the hole down arter him."

"Oh!" sighed Dot, disappointedly.

"It's one o' them wonders of natur' ye hear tell on. I never could understand it myself—like some ignerant landlubbers believin' the world is

flat! I know it's round, 'cos I been down one side o' it an' come up the other!

"As for science, an' them things, shipmets, I don't know nothin' 'bout 'em. I digs clams; I don't pester none erbout how they grows——"

And he promptly dug another and then a third. The girls watched him, fascinated at his skill. Nor did the "peg-leg" seem to trouble him at all in his work.

"Please, sir," asked Tess, after some moments, "how did you come to lose your leg—your really truly one, I mean?"

"Pi-*rats,*" declared the man, with an unmoved countenance. "Pi-*rats,* shipmet—on the Spanish Main."

"Oh!" breathed both girls together. Somehow that expression was faintly reminiscent to them. Agnes had a book about pirates, and she had read out loud in the evenings at the sitting-room table, at the old Corner House. Tess and Dot were not aware that "the Spanish Main" had been cleared of pirates, some years before this husky-voiced old clam-digger was born.

The clam-digger offered no details about his loss, and Tess and Dot felt some delicacy about asking further questions. Besides, Tom Jonah came along just then and evinced some distaste for the company of the roughly dressed one-legged man. Of course, he could not dig clams in his best clothes, as Tess pointed out; but Tom Jonah had confirmed doubts about all ill-dressed

people. So the girls accompanied the dog back towards the tents.

The big girls had been out in the boat and Ruth had left Agnes to bring up the oars and crab nets, as well as to moor the boat, while she hastened to get dinner.

The tide being on the turn they could not very well pull the boat up to the mooring post; but there was a long painter by which it could be tied to the post. Agnes, however, carried the oars up to the tent and then forgot about the rest of her task as she dipped into a new book.

Tess and Dot came to the empty boat and at once climbed in. Tom Jonah objected at first. He ran about on the sand—even plunged into the water a bit, and put both front paws on the gunwale.

If ever a dog said, "Please, *please,* little mistresses, get out of the boat!" old Tom Jonah said it!

But the younger Corner House girls paid no attention to him. They went out to the stern, which was in quite deep water, and began clawing overboard with the crab nets. With a whine, the dog leaped into the craft.

Now, whether the jar the dog gave it as he jumped into the boat, or his weight when he joined the girls in the stern, set the cedar boat afloat, will never be known. However, it slid into the water and floated free.

"We can catch some crabs, too, maybe, Tess," Dot said.

Neither of them noticed that the oars were gone, but had they been in the boat, Tess or Dot could not have used them—much. And surely Tom Jonah could not row.

They did not even notice that they were afloat until the tide, which was just at the turn, twisted the boat's nose about and they began drifting up the river.

"Oh, my, Dot!" gasped Tess. "Where are we going?"

"Oh-oo-ee!" squealed Dot, raking wildly with one of the nets. "I almost caught one."

"But we're adrift, Dot!" cried Tess.

The younger girl was not so much impressed at first. "Oh, I guess they'll come for us," she said.

"But Ruth and Aggie can't reach us—'nless they swim."

"Won't we float ashore again? We floated out here," said Dot.

She refused to be frightened, and Tess bethought her that she had no right to let her little sister be disturbed too much. She was old enough herself, however, to see that there was peril in this involuntary voyage. The tide was coming in strongly and the boat was quickly passing the bend. Before either Tess or Dot thought to cry out for help, they were out of sight of the camp and there was nobody to whom to call.

Tom Jonah had crouched down in the stern, with his head on his paws. He felt that he had done his duty. He had not allowed the two small girls to go without him on this voyage. He was with them; what harm could befall?

"I—I guess Alice would like to go ashore, Tess," hesitated Dot, at last, having seized her doll and sat down upon one of the seats. The boat was jumping a good deal as the little waves slapped her, first on one side and then on the other. Without anybody steering she made a hard passage of it.

"I'd like to get ashore myself, child," snapped Tess. "But I don't see how we are going to do it."

"Oh, Tess! are we going to be carried 'way out to sea?"

"Don't be a goosey! We're going *up* the river, not *down*," said the more observant Tess.

"Well, then!" sighed Dot, relieved. "It isn't so bad, is it? Of course, we'll stop somewhere."

"But it will soon be dinnertime," said her sister. "And I guess Ruth and Aggie won't know where we've gone to."

In fact, nobody about the tent colony had noticed the cedar boat floating away with the two girls in it—to say nothing of the dog!

CHAPTER XVI

THE GYPSIES AGAIN

When Ruth shouted to Agnes from the kitchen, where she was frying crabs, to call the children, Agnes dropped the book she had been reading and remembered for the first time that she had neglected to tie the boat.

"Oh, Ruth!" she shrieked. "See what I've done!"

Ruth came to the opening in the front of the tent, flushed and disheveled, demanding:

"Well, *what?* This old fat snaps so!"

"The boat!" cried Agnes.

Ruth stared up and down the shore. There were other boats drawn up on the sand and a few moored beyond low-water mark; but their boat was not in sight.

"Have you let it get away, Agnes Kenway?" Ruth demanded.

"Well! you don't suppose I went down there and pushed it off, do you?"

"This is no laughing matter——"

"I guess I—I'm not laughing," gulped Agnes. "It—it's go-o-one! See! the tide is flowing in and I forgot to tie it."

She was a little mixed here; it was the boat she had forgotten to tie.

"So," murmured Ruth; "if the boat had been tied, the tide wouldn't have carried it away," and she had no intention of punning, either! "*Now* what shall we do? That boat cost seventy-five dollars, the man said."

"Oh, Ruthie!"

"What will Mr. Howbridge say?"

"Oh, Ruthie!"

"No use crying about it," said the oldest Corner House girl, with decision. "*That* won't help."

"But—but it's gone out to sea."

"Nonsense! The tide has taken it up the river. It's gone round the bend. I hope it won't be smashed on the rocks, that's all. We must go after it."

"How?" asked the tearful Agnes.

"Get another boat, of course. But let's eat. The children will be hungry, and—— My goodness! the crabs are burning up!" and she ran back into the tent. "Get Tess and Dot, and tell them to hurry!" she called from inside.

But Tess and Dot were not to be found. The beach just then was practically deserted. It was the dinner hour and the various campers all had the sort of appetites that demands meals served promptly on time.

Agnes ran to the other tents in Camp Willowbend; but her small sisters were not with any of the neighbors. It was strange. They had been

forbidden to go out of sight of their own tent when neither Ruth nor Agnes was with them; and Tess and Dot were remarkably obedient children.

"I certainly do not understand it," Ruth said, when Agnes brought back the news.

At that moment a shuffling step sounded outside the tent and a husky voice demanded:

"Any clams terday, lady? Fresh clams—jest dug. Ten cents a dozen; two-bits for fifty; half a dollar a hundred. Fresh clams!"

"Oh!" cried Agnes, springing to the tent entrance so suddenly that the wooden-legged clam-man started back in surprise. "Oh! have you seen my sisters anywhere on the beach?"

"Hel-*lo!*" growled the startled man. "I dunno 'bout thet thar, shipmet. What kind o' sisters be they?"

"Two little girls," said Ruth, eagerly, joining Agnes at the opening. "One of them carried a doll in her arms. She is dark. The bigger one is fair."

The saltish old fellow chuckled deep in his hairy throat. "Guess I seen 'em, shipmets," he said. "Them's the leetle gals that didn't know clam-holes."

"Well! what became of them?" demanded the impatient Agnes.

"Why——I dug 'em, shipmet, an' they air in this i-den-ti-cal basket now," declared the clam-digger.

"Well!" gasped Agnes, behind her hand.

"Maybe the children didn't know clam-holes; but *he* doesn't know beans!"

Ruth asked again: "We mean, what became of the girls, sir?"

"I couldn't tell ye, shipmet. D'ye want any clams?" pursued this man of one idea. "Ten cents a dozen; two-bits for——"

"I'll buy some clams—yes," cried Ruth, in some desperation. "But tell us where you last saw our sisters, sir?"

"How many you want, shipmet?" demanded the quite unmoved old fellow.

"Two!" cried Agnes. "There were only two of them. Two little girls——Oh!"

Ruth had pinched her, and now said, calmly: "Please count out a hundred for us, sir. Here is fifty cents. And please tell us where you saw our little sisters?"

"I seed two small gals, shipmet, down on the flats yonder," said the clam digger, setting down his basket and squatting with the wooden leg stretched out before him. He began to busily count the clams onto the little platform before the tent.

"Where did they go, sir?" asked Ruth.

"I didn't take no pertic'lar notice of 'em, shipmet. They had a dratted dog with them——"

"Oh! Tom Jonah is with them. Then they *can't* be lost," gasped Agnes.

"Las' time I 'member of cockin' me eye at 'em," declared the old clam digger, "they was

inter a boat right down here below this tent. The dog was with 'em."

He counted out the last clam, took his fifty cents, and departed. The two older Corner House girls looked at each other. Agnes was very white.

"Do—do you suppose they drifted away in the boat?" she whispered.

"I expect so," agreed Ruth. "Come on, Ag. We'll go up beyond the bend and see if we can sight the boat."

"Oh! if they fall overboard——"

"Tom Jonah would bring them both ashore if they did, I believe," said Ruth, though her voice shook a little. "Do you want something to eat before you go?"

Agnes looked at her scornfully. "I don't ever want to eat again if Dot and Tess aren't found," she sobbed. "Come on!"

"We'll take something along to eat, if you don't want to eat here," Ruth said, sensibly. "The children will be hungry enough when we find them, you may be sure."

"*If* we find them," suggested the desperate Agnes.

"Don't talk like a goose, Ag!" exclaimed the older sister. "Of course we'll find them. They've only drifted away."

"But you said yourself the boat might be smashed against the rocks."

"Tom Jonah's with them," said Ruth, confi-

dently. "He could live in the water altogether, you know. Don't be worried about the children being drowned——Oh, Agnes!"

The change in her sister's voice startled Agnes, who had gone into the back part of the tent. She ran out to where Ruth was wrapping the fried soft-shell crabs in a sheet of brown paper.

Ruth was staring through the open flap of the tent. Outside, about where the clam digger had stood a few moments before, was the tall, scarred-faced Gypsy tramp that they had seen at the nomads' camp the day they came to Pleasant Cove!

"Oh, Ruth!" echoed Agnes, coming to Ruth's side.

But the older sister quickly recovered her self-possession. Her first thought was:

"If Tom Jonah were only here!"

Ruth went to the door. The man leered at her and doffed his old cap.

"Good day, little lady," he said. "She remember me—Big Jim—heh?"

"I remember you," Ruth said, shortly.

"Ver' proud," declared the Gypsy, bowing again.

"What do you want?" asked the oldest Corner House girl, with much more apparent courage than she really felt.

"You remember Zaliska—heh?" asked the man, shrewdly.

"I remember her," said Ruth.

"Little lady seen Zaliska since that day—heh?"

"What do you want to know for?" demanded Ruth, puzzled, yet standing her ground. She remembered in a flash all her suspicions regarding the young girl who masqueraded as the Gypsy Queen.

"Zaliska come here, heh?" said the man, doggedly, and with something besides curiosity in his narrow eyes.

"I don't know why I should tell you if she had been here," declared Ruth, while Agnes clung to her arm in fear.

"The little lady would fool Big Jim. No! We want find Zaliska."

"Don't come here for her," said Ruth, sharply. "She's not here."

"But she been here—heh?" repeated the fellow. "She come here like she was dressed at the camp—heh? Then she go away different—heh?"

Ruth knew well enough what he meant. He hinted that the masquerading girl had come here to see Ruth, and discarded her queen's garments and slipped away in her own more youthful character.

"I'm not sure that I know what you mean," she said to the evil-faced man. "But one thing I can tell you—and you can believe it. I have not seen Zaliska since that day we girls came by your camp."

"Ha! she come here to see you——"

"No. She went to the hotel and to a friend's

house in the village," said Ruth, "asking for me. I did not see her. She has not come here."

"Huh!" grunted the man, and backed away, doubtfully.

"Now we are busy and you must not trouble us any more," declared Ruth, hurriedly. "Come, Agnes!"

"He'll come in the tent and search it," whispered Agnes, in her sister's ear.

"I will speak to Mr. Stryver. He is here today," said Ruth, mentioning a neighbor in the camp.

"Big Jim," as the Gypsy called himself, had backed away from the tent, but he watched the departing girls with lowering gaze. At Mr. Stryver's tent Ruth halted long enough to tell the gentleman to keep his eye on the Gypsy man who was hanging about the camp.

"The women were here to sell baskets and such like truck while you girls were off crabbing, this morning," said Mrs. Stryver. "It gives me the shivers to have those folks around. I think we ought to have these tent camps policed."

"I'll 'tend to this fellow," promised Mr. Stryver, who was a burly man, and not afraid of anything.

Ruth hurried Agnes away toward the bend without another word.

"Why didn't you tell them Tess and Dot were lost?" asked Agnes, gulping down a sob.

"I don't want anybody to know it, if we can

help," returned Ruth. "It just looks as though we didn't take sufficient care of them."

"It—it was all my fault," choked Agnes. "If I had tied the boat as you told me——"

"It doesn't matter whose fault it is," said Ruth, quickly. "Or, if it is anybody's fault! We don't want folks to say that the Corner House girls from Milton don't know enough to take care of each other while they are under canvas."

CHAPTER XVII

ON WILD GOOSE ISLAND

"My!" Tess gasped, sitting in the stern of the drifting boat, "how fast the shores go past, Dot! We're going up the river awfully quick."

"And so j-j-jerky!" exclaimed her sister, clinging to the Alice-doll.

"You aren't really afraid, are you, Dot?"

"No-o. Only for Alice. She's always been weakly, you know, since that awful time she got buried alive," said Dot, seriously. "And if she should get wet and catch her death of cold——"

"But you mustn't drop her overboard," warned Tess.

"Do you s'pose I *would,* Tess Kenway?" demanded Dot, quite hurt by the suggestion.

"If she did fall overboard, Tom Jonah would save her, of course," went on Tess.

"Oh! don't you say such things," cried Dot. "And *do,* please, stop the boat from jerking so!"

"I—I guess it wants to be steered," Tess said.

The tiller ropes were at hand and Tess had observed Ruth and Agnes use them. She began experimenting with them and soon got the hang of using the rudder. But as the boat was propelled only by the tide, it *would* "wabble."

Tom Jonah watched all the small girls did with his keen eyes. But he scarcely moved. The boat floated on and on. Tess did not know how to work the boat ashore—indeed, caught as the craft was in the strong tide-rip, it would have taken considerable exertion with the oars to have driven it to land.

There chanced to be no other boats beyond the bend on this day. On either hand there were farms, but the houses were too far from the shores for the dwellers therein to notice the plight of the two small girls and the big dog in the bobbing cedar boat.

The shores at the river's edge were wooded for the most part, as was the long and narrow island in the middle of the river, not far ahead. This latter was called Wild Goose Island, as Tess and Dot knew.

"Maybe the boat will go ashore there," said Dot, more cheerfully.

"There are berries on that island," cried Tess. "Only they were not ripe when we were there last week." She was beginning to feel hungry; it was past midday.

"But we can't walk back to the tent from there," objected Dot.

"No-o," admitted Tess. "It'll be land, just the same!"

But the tide swept the cedar boat out from the lower end of the island and up the northern channel. It was this fact that hid the drifting boat

from the anxious eyes of Ruth and Agnes when they came around the bend, expecting to see the missing craft. The island hid it.

Wild Goose Island was more than half a mile long. In the channel where the boat floated, the current of the river and the inflowing tide began to battle.

There were eddies that seized the boat and swept it in circles. The surface of the channel was rippled by small waves. The boat bobbed every-which-way, for Tess could not control the rudder.

"Oh, dear me!" gasped Dot. "I—I am afraid my Alice-doll will be sick. Do—don't you s'pose we can get ashore, Tess?"

But Tess did not see how they could do that, although the boat was now and then swept very close to the shore of the island.

The island was a famous picnicking place; but there were no pleasure seekers there to-day. The shore seemed deserted as the girls were swept on by the resistless tide.

Suddenly Dot stood right up and squealed—pointing at the island. Tom Jonah lifted his head and barked.

"There's somebody, Tess!" declared Dot.

The bigger Corner House girl had seen the face break through the fringe of bushes on the island shore. It was a dark, beautiful face, and it was a girl's.

"Oh! oh! Let's call her," gasped Tess. "She'll help us."

The two small Kenways had a strong belief in the goodness of humanity at large. They expected that anybody who saw their plight would come to their rescue if possible.

For fully a minute, however, the girl in the bushes of Wild Goose Island did not come out into the open. Tess and Dot shouted again and again, while Tom Jonah lifted up his head and bayed most mournfully.

If the girl on the island did not want general attention attracted to the place, it behooved her to come out of concealment and try to pacify the drifting trio in the cedar boat.

Her face was very red when she reappeared in an open place on the shore. The distance between her and the boat, which was now caught in a small eddy, was only a few yards.

"What's the matter with you?" she demanded, in rather a sharp tone.

"We—we can't stop the boat," responded Tess.

"We want to get ashore," added Dorothy.

"How did you get out there?" asked the strange girl. She was older than Ruth, and although she was very pretty, Tess and Dot were quite sure they did not like her—much!

"We got in it, and it floated away with us," said Tess.

"Where from?" asked the girl on shore.

"Oh! 'way down the river. 'Round that turn. We live at Willowbend Camp with Ruth and Aggie."

"Ruth *Who?*" the other demanded, sharply.

"Our sister, Ruth Kenway," said Tess.

The girl on the island was silent for a moment, while the boat turned lazily in the eddy. It now was headed up stream again, when she said:

"Is that dog good for anything?"

"Tom Jonah?" cried Tess and Dot together. "Why, he's the best dog that ever *was,*" Dot added.

"Does he know anything?" insisted the strange girl.

"Uncle Rufus says he's just as knowin' as any human," Tess said, impressively.

"Does he mind?" pursued the girl on the shore.

"Oh, yes," said Tess. "He'll sit up and beg —and shakes hands—and lies down and rolls over —and——"

"Say! those tricks won't help you any," cried the other. "Can you make him swim ashore here?"

"Why—ee——I don't know," stammered Tess.

"We wouldn't want to let you have Tom Jonah," Dorothy hastened to explain.

"Goodness knows, *I* don't want him," said the big girl, still tartly. "But if he can swim ashore with the end of that rope you have coiled there in the bow of your boat, tied to his collar, he may be of some use."

"Oh, yes!" cried Tess, scrambling toward the bow at once.

"See that the other end is fast to your boat," commanded the girl on the island.

It was. Tess quickly knotted the free end of the long painter to Tom Jonah's collar.

"Now send him ashore, child!" cried the big girl.

Tom Jonah was looking up at Tess with his wonderfully intelligent eyes. He seemed to understand just what was expected of him when the rope was tied to his collar.

"Go on, Tom Jonah! Overboard!" cried Tess, firmly.

"He—he'll get all wet, Tess," objected Dot, plaintively.

"That won't hurt him, Dot," explained her sister. "You know he loves the water."

"Come on, here!" cried the girl on the island, snapping her fingers. "Push him overboard."

But Tom Jonah did not need such urging. With his forepaws on the gunwale of the boat he barked several times. The boat tipped a little and Dot screamed, clutching the Alice-doll tighter to her bosom.

"Go on, Tom Jonah!" shouted Tess. "You're rocking the boat!"

The big dog leaped over the gunwale into the river, leaving the light craft tossing in a most exciting fashion. Some water even slopped over the side.

"Come on, sir! come on!" shouted the girl ashore.

Tom Jonah swam directly for the beach where she stood. The line uncoiled freely behind him, slipping into the water. It was long enough to reach the shore where the big girl stood; but none too long.

The sag of the rope in the water began to trouble Tom Jonah, strong as he was. Quickly the girl drew off her shoes and stockings and waded in to meet the laboring dog.

"Come on, sir! now we'll get them!" she urged, laying hold of the line.

The dog scrambled ashore, barking loudly. The line was taut and the boat had swung around, tugging on the other end like a thing of life.

"Now we have them!" cried the girl.

She pulled hard on the rope. Tom Jonah, seeing what she was doing, caught the rope in his strong jaws, and set back to pull, too. Tess and Dot screamed with delight.

As the big girl slowly drew in the rope the dog backed up the beach, and so the cedar boat, with its two remaining passengers, came to land.

"Oh, dear me! Oh, dear me!" gasped Dot, standing in the bow of the boat. "I'm so glad to get ashore. And so's my Alice-doll," she added, seriously.

Tess helped her sister to jump down upon the sand and then followed, herself. Tom Jonah

dropped the rope and bounded about them, barking his satisfaction. But the strange girl was looking up and down the river, and over at the opposite shore, with a mind plainly disturbed.

"Come on, now!" she said, sharply. "Unfasten the rope from that dog's collar. We'll keep *that*. It may come in handy."

"Don't you want it to pull the boat up on the beach?" asked Tess, as she obeyed the command.

The strange girl was already unfastening the rope from the ring in the bow of the boat. She threw the line ashore and then pushed the boat off with such vigor that she ran knee deep into the river again.

"Oh! oh!" squealed Dot. "You'll lose our boat."

"I want to lose it," declared the girl, coming back very red in the face from her exertions. "I got you kids ashore, 'cause you might have been tipped over, or hurt in some way. I'm not going to be bothered by that boat."

"But that's Ruthie's boat," exclaimed Tess.

"I can't help it! You young ones go into the bushes there and sit down. Keep quiet, too. Take the dog with you and keep *him* quiet. Don't let him run about, or bark. If he does I'll tie him to a tree and muzzle him."

"Why—why, I don't think that's very nice of you," said Tess, who was too polite, and had too deep a sense of gratitude, to say just what she

really thought of this conduct on the part of the strange girl. "We might have saved the boat for Ruth."

"And it would give me dead away," declared the big girl, angrily. "You children be satisfied that I took you ashore. Now keep still!"

"I—I don't believe I like her very much, Tess," Dot whispered again.

The older Corner House girl was not only puzzled by the strange girl's actions and words, but she was somewhat frightened. She and Dot sat down among the bushes, where they were completely hidden from the river and the opposite shore, and called Tom Jonah to them.

He lay at their feet. He had shaken himself comparatively dry, and now he put his head on his paws and went to sleep.

"Well," sighed Tess, caressing the dog's head. "I'm glad we have him with us."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SEARCH

Ruth and Agnes went around the wooded point, called "Willowbend," and looked up the river. As we already know, the drifting boat, with Tess and Dot and Tom Jonah in it, had gone out of sight on the other side of Wild Goose Island.

"It never came this way, Ruth!" groaned the frightened Agnes. "They've drifted out to sea, just as I said."

"Nothing of the kind," Ruth declared, bound to keep up her sister's courage, and knowing well that her conscience was punishing her cruelly. "The tide is coming in. They were bound to float up the river. But maybe the boat's gone ashore somewhere."

"Or it's sunk," said the lugubrious Agnes.

"Now you stop that, Aggie Kenway!" cried Ruth, stamping her foot. "I won't have it. With Tom Jonah those children would not easily get into trouble."

"They could fall out of the boat," urged Agnes, wiping her eyes.

"They'd not be foolish enough to rock the boat.

It's all right, I tell you. I *did* expect to see the boat from this spot; but it's floated into some cove somewhere. The children are safe enough——"

"You don't know!" blubbered Agnes.

"Keep still! Yes, I *do* know—I know as well as I want to. But we'll have to ask for help to find them."

"What kind of help?" asked Agnes.

"We'll get Mr. Stryver's motorboat," said the oldest Corner House girl, with decision.

As they went back around the bend they heard a chorus of shouts from the camp. Agnes was startled, being in a nervous state, anyway.

"What is that, Ruth? The Gypsies?" she demanded.

"If it is, then the Gypsies have adopted the Milton high school yell. Don't you recognize it?" returned Ruth. "The boys have arrived."

"Neale O'Neil!"

"I suppose Neale is with them."

"He will help us," cried the delighted Agnes, sure in the ability of Neale O'Neil to do almost anything.

"Well—I suppose he may," admitted Ruth, slowly.

Ruth had made no mistake in identifying the school yell of their boy friends. There was a crowd of boys at the two big tents reserved for Joe Eldred and his friends. They had just come on the auto-stage.

Already an American flag and the school pennant were being raised on the flag-pole before the tents. The scene at Willowbend Camp had been a most quiet one ten minutes before; now it seemed to be alive in every part, and the boys from Milton were all over it.

They were like a herd of young colts let loose in a new pasture. They got the flags up before the girls came back, and then began running races, and playing leap-frog on the sand. The midday heat made no difference to them.

"Doesn't that water look inviting?" shouted Ben Truman to Joe and some of the bigger boys. "When do we go in swimming, Joe?"

"*You* can go when you like, Bennie," returned Eldred.

"I'd like right now," declared the youngster.

"Clothes and all, I suppose, Ben?" drawled Neale O'Neil.

"What's clothes? I'm not afraid to go in just as I am."

"I dare you, Ben!" shouted another of the boys, knowing the spirit of Truman.

"Done!" exclaimed Ben, and sprang away toward the in-coming tide. He splashed half-knee deep into the river before the others could call him back. He probably had no intention of going any deeper; but inadvertently he stepped into one of the holes the wooden-legged man had recently made when he dug for clams there, and over Ben pitched upon his nose!

There was a great shout of laughter. Ben was submerged—every bit! He came up blowing like a porpoise.

"Come on in, fellows! the water's fine!" he gasped, not embarrassed by the accident.

"Thank you. We'll wait till the bathing suits arrive," returned Neale. "Hello! Here are the Corner House girls—two of them, at least."

He hurried forward to greet Ruth and Agnes. The other boys simmered down a little when they observed the girls; most of them doffed their caps politely, but only Joe and Neale knew Ruth and Agnes very well.

"Oh, Neale!" was the latter's greeting to her boy friend. "Don't tell the other fellows, but Tess and Dot are lost."

"Great goodness, Ag! You don't mean it?" cried Neale, keenly troubled by her statement.

"It's not as bad as *that*," Ruth interposed. "They are out in our boat with Tom Jonah."

"I knew you had him down here. He'll take care of them," said Neale, with confidence.

"Yes, I know," agreed Ruth. "But they all got in the boat unbeknown to Aggie and me, and the tide's carried them up the river."

"You don't *know!*" burst out Agnes.

"Well, they couldn't have drifted out into the cove, that's sure!" returned the older Corner House girl. "I'm going to get Mr. Stryver's motorboat. Will you take us out in it and look

for the children, Neale? You can run a motor-boat, can't you?"

"Sure! And I'll do anything I can to help find the children," declared Neale O'Neil. "Now, don't you girls turn on the sprinklers——"

"Who's crying?" gulped Agnes, angrily.

"You are—pretty nearly. And your eyes are all red."

"Hay fever," sniffed Agnes, trying to joke.

"I'm going to get the boat right away. Come on, Neale," cried Ruth, and she started for the Stryver tent. "I'm worried about those children," she added, over her shoulder. "There are Gypsies about."

She hurried on and Neale took Agnes by the elbow and led her out of all possible earshot of the other boys.

"Buck up, Aggie," he said, gruffly, as a boy will. "You've been a good little sport—always. Don't blubber about it."

"But it was I who forgot to tie the boat," Agnes said.

"Tell me about it," urged Neale. So Agnes gave him the particulars. "Funny how the boat should have drifted out of sight so quickly," was the boy's comment.

"Isn't it? But it's go-o-one——"

"There, there! We'll find it and the children will be all right," he assured her.

Ruth came running with the key to the padlock

that moored the *Nimble Shanks* to the mooring stake. They got out to her—just the two girls and Neale—in a dory.

The *Nimble Shanks* was a blue boat with a high prow and long, sweeping lines to the low stern. It was not a large boat, but was built for speed. The engine and steering-gear were amidships and were arranged so that one man could handle the craft.

Neale was naturally of a mechanical turn, as well as an athlete. He had built a kerosene engine during the winter, with some assistance from Mr. Con Murphy, the shoemaker with whom he lived in Milton. Moreover, he had driven a boat just like this one of Mr. Stryver's on the Milton river.

While Ruth was unlocking the chain of the *Nimble Shanks,* and fastening the dory in its place, Neale whirled the fly-wheel and caught the ignition spark; immediately the exhaust began to pop and Neale shouted:

"All free, there, Ruth?"

"Let her go, Neale!" returned Agnes, eagerly. "I can't wait, it seems to me."

"Sit tight, then, ladies," said Neale, as Ruth scrambled aft. "I believe this craft can be made to travel."

The girls obeyed as the *Nimble Shanks* started. She shot right out into the middle of the river, and the wave thrown up by her wedge-like bow rose higher and higher on either hand. Actually,

when the motorboat had been running for five minutes, the girls in the sternsheets seemed sitting at a much lower level than the surface of the river.

"Goodness! if this boat stopped suddenly we'd be drowned by that wave," gasped Ruth.

Neale headed up the river in a grand curve. They could see the shores on either hand. The boys ashore cheered their departure, though they did not know their errand.

They shot by the wooded bend like an express train. The girls kept watch on either hand for the boat. They hoped to see her rocking in some cove along one shore or the other.

But it was Neale himself who first sighted the drifting craft. The motorboat took the south channel in passing Wild Goose Island. Neale suddenly brought the speed of the craft down to one-half.

"There's a boat ahead," he said to the girls. "It appears to be empty. Stand up and see if it's the one."

Ruth rose and clung to Agnes' shoulder to steady herself. She saw the empty cedar boat, bobbing on the little waves beyond the far point of Wild Goose Island.

"It's her!" she said, breathlessly. "But where are the children?"

"We'll find out," said Neale, quickly. "Sit down again."

"And Tom Jonah?" urged Ruth.

"Make up your mind that wherever the children are, *he* is, too," said Neale, and he let the *Nimble Shanks* out again, and Ruth tumbled promptly into her seat.

The motorboat fairly leaped ahead. In five minutes they were near the empty boat, and Neale shut off the engine entirely. Under the momentum she had gained she slid right up beside the tossing cedar boat.

"Oh, oh!" groaned Agnes. "Where *have* they gone?"

"Not overboard, that's sure," said Neale, cheerfully. "They would have overturned the boat."

"I—don't—know," began Ruth.

"Oh, Ruth!" shrieked Agnes. "Maybe they were not in her after all."

"But that clam man said he saw them."

"He didn't see them in the boat when it was afloat," said Agnes, clinging to the safer possibility.

"I know. But where else did they go?"

"Down the beach, maybe," said Neale, slowly.

"The Gypsies have gotten them!" exclaimed Agnes, in despair.

"Stop it, Ag!" cried Ruth, shaking her sister. "You can think up the most perfectly awful things——"

"Bet they got out of the boat on the shore somewhere, and let it drift away again," suggested Neale, rather feebly.

"It wouldn't be like Tess to do such a foolish thing," said Ruth, shaking her head.

"They didn't have anything to tie the boat up with. There's no painter in her," said the observant Neale.

"Of course there's a painter!" cried Agnes, jumping up. "A nice long one——"

"Where is it?" demanded the boy.

"Oh, Ruth! *That's* gone!" gasped Agnes.

"Say!" said Neale, very seriously; "ropes don't come untied of themselves. Sure it was fastened to the boat?"

"To that ring," Ruth declared, confidently.

"And little Tess, or Dot, wouldn't think to untie it themselves—I'm sure," the boy observed. "They are with somebody who has taken them out of the boat—be sure of that."

"You only—only say so to comfort us," sobbed Agnes.

"Oh, Ag! stop being a 'leaky vessel'!" cried Neale, with a boy's exasperation at a girl's tears. "Crying won't help you any."

Ruth had been examining the cedar boat, carefully. There was a little water in the bottom of it. She knew it did not leak. And floating on the water was a tiny russet leather slipper.

"That belongs to Dot's Alice-doll!" she cried, leaning over the gunwale and fishing for the slipper. "They *were* in the boat."

"We knew that before. The clam man said so," sniffed Agnes.

"But they got out in a hurry. Otherwise Dot would have noticed that the doll had lost her slipper."

"That seems reasonable," admitted Neale O'Neil. "But what's become of them? Where did they go? Where are they now?"

He was staring all about the river, while the two boats gently rubbed together, bobbing and courtesying on the tide.

"Don't see anybody on the shores—and not another boat in sight," the boy added.

"Maybe they went ashore on the island?" suggested Agnes, looking back.

"There's nobody there," said her sister, looking back, too. "Not a soul."

"Guess you're right. If there were anybody besides the girls there they'd have some kind of a boat, and we'd see it."

"That's so, Neale," Ruth said. "And surely any grown person who rescued the girls wouldn't have let the boat drift away again."

The trio of searchers gazed at each other in trouble and amazement. They could not explain this mystery in any satisfactory way.

CHAPTER XIX

A STARTLING MEETING

Tess and Dot, sitting in the middle of a brush clump on Wild Goose Island, never saw the blue motorboat with their sisters and Neale O'Neil in it, fly past.

But the dark-faced girl, dressed in her bedraggled Gypsy finery, saw the *Nimble Shanks,* for she was on the watch at one side or the other of the island, all the time.

She observed the motorboat overtake the drifting craft, and saw Neale carry a line aboard the latter and then start up the engine of the power boat again. The two boats went up the lake at a fair pace; but the searching party could not travel so fast now, for fear of swamping the towed boat.

"I don't think this is much fun," said Dot, plaintively, when the big girl came back to them. "It's hot here—and I'm hungry—and my Alice-doll has lost one of her shoes."

"We'll go up into the woods and pick some berries," said the strange girl, not unkindly. "I know where there are some strawberries—and they're just as sweet."

"Oh! that will be fine. I *do* love strawberries," declared Dot, easily appeased.

Tess was more troubled than her sister by this strange situation. She felt, somehow, as though the big girl were holding them prisoners. Yet she could not understand *why*.

She got up from the ground and at once Tom Jonah started up, barking and bounding about.

"Stop that dog!" exclaimed the big girl, crossly. "Make him walk beside you. I'll tie him up," she threatened.

"Then he'll howl *awful*," cried Dot. "We tried that once at home. Don't you 'member, Tess?"

"Well, you keep him still," snapped the big girl.

At a word from Tess the old dog drooped his tail and fell in behind them, in a most subdued manner. They went up through the thick woods to the higher part of the island. At no point could the little procession have been seen from the water.

There was a hillock up there, bare of trees, the southern side of which was sown thickly with strawberries. The bed was rich in berries, and how sweet and delicate was their flavor!

"Oh, *so* much nicer than boughten berries!" Tess declared, forgetting for the time all her anxiety.

Indeed, both of the Corner House girls were so busy satisfying their appetites with straw-

berries that they forgot about the unpleasant side to their adventure. Nor did they see the girl who had helped them ashore from the boat, creep over the knoll to watch the motorboat and its tow going down the river again, by way of the northern channel.

It was fully half past one. While Tess and Dot feasted in the wild strawberry patch, their sisters and Neale O'Neil munched cold, fried crabs on the *Nimble Shanks*.

It took a lot of berries to satisfy the healthy appetites of two girls like Tess and Dot whose dinner had been indefinitely postponed. Dot finally rolled right over in the shade, fast asleep, her dress and fingers berry-stained and the last plump one she had picked between her rosy lips!

The big girl came back and Tess whispered: "We'd best not wake her, for she usually takes a nap afternoons. When she wakes up, I guess we'd best be going. Ruth and Agnes will be *awfully* scared for us. And we've lost Ruth's boat, too," she added, disconsolately.

"How do you expect to get off this island?" demanded the strange girl.

"Why! how did you get *on?*" returned Tess.

"I paddled myself over on a raft of logs, early this morning before anybody else was up," said the girl, after a minute. "I wasn't going back till night. But if I keep you children all day there'll be a big row, I s'pose," she added, sullenly.

"I expect there will," was Tess' calm response.

"They'd get me for kidnapping, like enough," said the girl, as though talking to herself. "Wish I hadn't taken you out of that boat. But you and the dog were raising an awful noise."

"I'm sorry," said Tess, politely, "if we have been a nuisance. But of course we've got to get back to the tent before dark."

"I s'pose so," admitted the older girl.

"It's funny Ruth hasn't been up here before now looking for us," Tess observed.

The big girl turned her head so Tess should not see her face. "Suppose she did not know you went sailing in the boat?" she said.

"Why! perhaps that is the reason," Tess agreed. "They couldn't have seen us; for if they had, Ruth would have been after the boat in a hurry."

"Well," said the strange girl, "I'll have to get you across to the river bank. I wasn't going till night. But——"

"We are very much obliged to you," Tess hastened to say. "But we *couldn't* stay that long."

"Oh, well! I'll leave you children at a farmer's over there. They'll have a telephone and they'll get word to your sisters. You'll get back by suppertime."

"Thank you," Tess said, simply.

But she was more than a little disturbed in her mind. A raft of logs did not encourage her to

look forward to the trip to the mainland with much pleasure.

Besides, the mystery regarding this pretty girl made Tess feel uncomfortable. Tess Kenway was quite old enough to know the difference between right and wrong; and there was something about the strange girl that was decidedly wrong!

Why had she come out here to Wild Goose Island in the early morning—before anybody in the neighborhood was up? Was she a runaway? Had she done something really *naughty?* and was she afraid to have her folks find her?

It was all a great puzzle and Tess sighed and shook her head. Finally she asked: "If you please, where *is* the raft of logs?"

"Right down there," said the girl, pointing to the southern side of the island. "You can't see it. I dragged it into shallow water and covered it up with branches and brush."

"Is—is it safe?" queried Tess.

"Well, it didn't drown me coming over," said the girl, with a short, hard laugh. "But the logs came near parting."

"Oh!"

"I'll fix 'em before we start back. That painter off your boat will help. We will be all right," said the big girl, carelessly.

Dot awoke after a little, and so did Tom Jonah. The whole party went down to the brush-fringed shore. Tess saw that the girl had hidden her

raft very ingeniously. And it was evident, too, that she hated to leave the island so long before evening.

"Got myself in a nice mess!" the Corner House girl heard her mutter, as she went about binding the three logs together more tightly with the strong rope from the cedar boat.

She worked hard for half an hour, standing almost waist deep in the water as she made the logs secure. It was not a heavy raft—nor was it very safe looking, to Tess' mind.

But fortunately Dot thought it would be great fun to ride on such a craft, and Tess was too brave to say anything that would really frighten Dorothy.

Tom Jonah became restless and wanted to wander about; but the big girl was very sharp with him. "If he were my dog I'd make him mind better!" she threatened. "If anything gives us away, it will be that dog."

Tess did not understand this; and like Dot she felt hurt when anybody criticised Tom Jonah. "Love me, love my dog" was the motto of the younger Kenway sisters.

Finally the big girl pronounced the raft strong enough, and she waded out of the water and put on her skirts again. "Now, get aboard there," she commanded. "If we've got to go, we might as well start. The tide will be less strong now."

Dot skipped aboard the raft with her Alice-doll, in great glee; Tess followed more slowly.

But when Tom Jonah tried to come, too, the big girl, with the broken oar she used for a paddle, drove him back.

"It won't hold him up, too!" she cried. "Get out!"

"Oh! don't hurt Tom Jonah!" wailed Dot, shrilly. "Don't!"

"You look out!" warned Tess. "He'll grab you!"

Tom Jonah certainly *did* grab the paddle. And he nearly wrenched it from the hands of the big girl, strong as she was.

"He'll tip us all over!" declared the girl, angrily, flushed and breathing heavily. "Don't you see how deep in the water we are? Any little wave will come right over the logs and wet us."

"Well!" cried Tess. "We're barefooted. And we can't leave Tom Jonah behind."

"He can swim, can't he? Silly!" exclaimed the big girl. She pushed off the raft suddenly, leaving the troubled dog on the bank. The current caught the raft instantly and headed it down stream. The big girl hurried to dip her paddle in the water on the lower side and swerve the head of the raft around.

"Oh, Tom Jonah! Come! Come!" cried Dot, fearful that the dog would be lost.

He plunged right in and swam to the rear of the raft. He did not try to climb aboard, but he rested his nose on the logs and paddled quietly behind. The big girl paid him no further attention. She

had her hands full as it was, keeping the raft from being swept down stream.

The current of the river had now conquered the in-flowing tide. The force of the latter was spent; but the channel on this side of the island was not rough. The little waves did not break over their feet as yet.

The passage of the river was not, however, so hard. The handsome dark girl was strong, and she plied the broken oar with vigor. In half an hour they drew near to the tree-fringed southern bank.

The girls saw nobody along the shore, nor had any boat put out to meet them. It was a day when all the farmers seemed to be busy in their fields, and this was a wild spot toward which the raft had been aimed.

At last the end of the logs touched a shelving, narrow beach. The big girl leaped off and commanded Tess and Dot to follow immediately. Already Tom Jonah had scrambled ashore and was shaking himself, as a dog will.

Suddenly the big dog uttered a throaty growl. None of the three girls paid any attention. The strange girl was busy helping Tess and Dot to land.

Again Tom Jonah uttered his warning, and then barked sharply.

"Shut up!" commanded the big girl, turning on him fiercely.

At that moment a man walked out of the wood.

He was a fierce little fellow with a black mustache and a dirty red tie. His velveteen suit was worn and greasy and his hat broken.

The strange girl turned suddenly and saw him. She uttered a stifled scream and the fellow folded his arms and said something to her sternly in a language that afterwards Tess said "sounded like powder-crackers exploding!"

The girl was terrified in the extreme. She looked from side to side as though contemplating escape. The fellow took another stride toward her.

And then Tom Jonah intervened. The big dog sprang with an awful growl, hurling himself straight at the man's chest. The fellow went over backward and Tom Jonah held him down with both paws on his chest and his bared teeth at the victim's brown throat!

CHAPTER XX

THE FRANKFURTER MAN

Dot screamed shrilly; but Tess said, with conviction: "Well! I think it serves him right. Let him holler. He had no business trying to steal Ruthie's chickens."

For the young man that Tom Jonah held on the ground, and threatened so dreadfully, was the very Gypsy that had gotten into the hencoop at the old Corner House in Milton, weeks before.

"Now, don't you be afraid for him, Dot," added Tess, quite calmly. "Tom Jonah won't really *bite* him—not as long as he keeps still and doesn't try to get up——"

The fellow was moaning and begging just as he had when the big dog "treed" him on the henhouse roof.

"Tak' away dog! Tak' away dog!" he begged.

"I don't know why we should—do you, Dot?" pursued Tess, undisturbed. "He was going to hurt *her*——"

Tess turned around. The strange girl who had helped them out of the cedar boat and later had brought them to the river bank from Wild Goose Island, had disappeared like a shadow!

"Why—why," stammered Tess. "And she never said 'Good-bye'!"

"I guess she was afraid of this man," Dot said, eyeing the prostrate and miserable victim of Tom Jonah's attack without much pity. "What shall we do with him?"

"Oh!" cried Tess, with a sudden sharp idea. "She *was* afraid of him. Let us help her. She helped us."

"How will we?" inquired the smaller girl.

"Just let Tom Jonah hold him where he is. We will give that pretty girl a good chance to get away. Won't we?"

"That will be just the thing," agreed Dot. "We can sit down and wait. I hope it isn't too long a walk to the camp, Tess. Somehow those strawberries didn't stay by me—much. I'm hungry right now!"

"We'll keep him here a few minutes. Then we'll find the road and start right back home. I know the direction," said Tess, with confidence.

The frightened Gypsy moaned and begged for them to call off the dog; and Tom Jonah growled most frightfully every time the man squirmed. Under other circumstances the girls would have been quite stricken with pity for the poor man; but he had tried to steal Ruth's hens, and he had now frightened their new friend away, and, as Dot whispered, "it served him right."

Of course, they knew that the big dog would not really harm the fellow.

After some fifteen minutes Tess got up and motioned Dot to do the same. "We'd better start. The afternoon is going," she said to her younger sister. "And I guess it's a long walk home. Come on, Tom Jonah."

The old dog lifted his head enquiringly. The muscles of his shoulders and fore-paws relaxed.

"Come on!" commanded Tess. "Leave him alone. Let him up, Tom Jonah! I guess he has been punished enough. Don't you think so, Dot?"

The smaller girl nodded seriously, staring at the trembling Gypsy. "I hope you won't ever try to steal our Ruthie's hens again," she said, pointedly.

The moment the fellow knew he was free, he scrambled up and dodged into the bushes. He did not stay for a word.

"That big girl must have gotten away by this time," Tess said, cheerfully. "And he is too scared to catch her, anyway."

Which was probably true. The two small girls walked away from the river bank in the direction where they knew the auto-stage road lay. Tom Jonah paced beside them, looking about suspiciously, and licking his lips now and then with his red tongue.

It was remarkable how ferocious he had been with that Gypsy, and how perfectly kind he was to

the small Kenways. And nothing much could have overtaken them just then that Tom Jonah would not have attacked.

They came out of the fringe of wood that bordered the river and crossed a farmer's fields. But the house was at a distance, and in the other direction from Pleasant Cove and the camps; so the girls did not go to that house.

In fact, Tess felt quite brave now that she was again on the mainland. She was sure that they could easily find Willowbend Camp.

They came out into the hot, dusty road. It stretched before them as bare as a tennis-court and as hot as a sea-beach. The trees that bordered it were white with dust far up their trunks and the leaves of their lower branches, too, were dust-covered.

This was the result of rapidly passing automobiles on the road; but none of these vehicles was in sight now. The road seemed deserted.

Save for just one thing. Dot saw it before Tess.

"Oh, look!" the smaller girl cried. "Isn't that a peanut man, Tess? Don't you wish you had a nickel?"

"He isn't a peanut man," said Tess, after a sharp look at the man pushing the little wagon along the road before them.

"Isn't he?" returned Dot, disappointedly.

"It's a hot-frankfurter man," declared Tess.

"Oh, Tess! a nickel would buy two frankfurter sandwiches," gasped Dot. "And I'm *so* hungry."

So was Tess. The thought of the steaming sausages lying on the split Vienna roll, with a spoonful of mustard on each half-sausage, was enough to make *any* hungry person's mouth water. At least, any hungry person of the age of Tess and Dot Kenway.

Where the frankfurter man had been with his wagon away up this country road, the girls did not know; but before they overtook him they smelled the warm sausages and saw that the top of his boxlike wagon was covered over with a glass case and that everything was clean about his outfit.

So eager and hungry were they that Tess and Dot fairly trotted through the hot dust to overtake the man. He was a short, sturdy man in a blue shirt, khaki trousers, and a broad-brimmed straw hat. When Tom Jonah bounded along beside him, sniffing in a friendly fashion, he turned around and saw the girls.

"How-de-do!" he said, smiling. "You want a hot frankfurter, little girls?"

"Yes, sir," said Dot, frankly.

"Oh, we can't, sir—not till we get to Willowbend Camp," Tess hastened to say, squeezing Dot's hand admonishingly.

Dot's lower lip trembled and the man asked:

"Why can't you have 'em now?"

"We—we should have to ask Ruthie," said Tess, slowly.

"Who's she?"

"Our sister. We—we don't carry any money in these old clothes. She's afraid we'll lose it out of our pockets," said Tess, honestly.

"Oh-ho!" exclaimed the man.

"But we're awful hungry," ventured Dot. "And so's my Alice-doll. We been shipwrecked, you see."

"Shipwrecked?" asked the man, wonderingly.

"Not just *that,* Dot," said Tess, doubtfully. "We were sort of castaways."

"Well, we lost our boat, didn't we?" demanded Dot. "And isn't that being shipwrecked?" She was just hungry and tired enough to be rather "touchy."

"Tell me about it," said the frankfurter man, as the girls and Tom Jonah trotted along beside his little wagon.

So Tess—with much assistance from Dot—related their exciting adventures since the wooden-legged clam-digger had shown them what it was that squirted water up through the tiny holes on the clam-flat.

Sometimes the frankfurter man laughed, or chuckled; at other times he looked quite grave. And finally he insisted upon stopping under a broad, shady tree beside the road, and resting while he listened to the remainder of the story.

Meanwhile he opened the glass case and took

out a couple of paper napkins and two rolls which were as white as snow when he split them with a very sharp knife. He buttered both sides of these rolls lavishly.

Then he opened the steaming frankfurter pot and oh! how the luscious steam gushed out! Dot grabbed Tess' hand hard. She thought she was going to faint, for a moment—it smelled so good!

He selected two fat frankfurters and split them evenly. He placed them on the buttered rolls. He put on mustard with a lavish hand. And then he closed the rolls and wrapped the napkins about them.

Suddenly he saw Tom Jonah standing, too, watching him with wistful intentness, his pink tongue hanging out of his mouth. If ever a dog's countenance expressed hunger, it was shown now in Tom Jonah's face. But he was too much of a gentleman, just as his collar said, to bark.

So the frankfurter man, without saying a word, opened the pot again and took out a third sausage. This he did not split or put mustard on.

"Would you little girls like to eat a lunch now and pay me for it the next time you see me?" he asked, smiling at Tess and Dot.

"Oh!" gasped Dot, clasping her hands and almost letting the Alice-doll fall.

"You—you are *so* kind!" said Tess, her voice fairly trembling.

He passed the two wrapped sandwiches over

with a polite bow. "You are very welcome," he said. "And I am going to give your dog one for himself because he grabbed that Gypsy. He's a brave dog and deserves one."

"Oh! if you would be so good!" cried Tess.

Tom Jonah made one mouthful of the frankfurter. You see, *he* had not cared at all for the strawberries!

"Now," said the frankfurter man, as the girls walked on beside him again, munching their sandwiches, "that road yonder to the left leads right down to the beach and to those tents. You can see the flags flying above them now—see?"

"Oh, yes, sir!" returned Tess and Dot, in delight.

"Then you can easy find your way. Good-day, young ladies. I know your sisters will be anxious to see you."

"Thank you, sir," Tess said, not forgetting her manners. "And we shall not forget that we owe you for the sausages."

"That's right. Always pay your debts," said the man, laughing, and trundled his cart on through the dust, while the Kenway sisters trudged down the shadier road toward the beach.

In fifteen minutes they were seen coming. The entire encampment had turned out to search for the lost children. The boys from Milton had gone in all directions to look for Tess and Dot.

It was only to Ruth and Agnes that the small

girls related the details of their surprising adventure. And Agnes did not understand entirely, and was much troubled over the identity of the girl who had befriended her sisters in so strange a fashion.

Ruth had no difficulty in guessing who she was. It was the girl with the Gypsies who had masqueraded as the queen. The oldest Corner House girl was sure that it was she. And Ruth understood that she must be striving to get away from the Gypsies.

"I hope she won't go so far from here that I shall never see her again," thought Ruth. "For she was interested in Rosa Wildwood, I am sure; and it might be that she could tell me something about Rosa's missing sister."

While Agnes put forth many "guesses" and "supposin's" about the strange girl, Dot had quite another problem in her enquiring mind. And finally, as they were getting ready for bed that night, she threw out a leading question which attracted the immediate attention of her three sisters:

"Say, Ruthie," she asked, "how do frankfurters grow?"

"What?" gasped Agnes, and clapped a hand over her own mouth to keep from laughing.

"How do they *grow*, dear?" returned Ruth, rather taken aback herself.

"Goodness gracious, child!" exclaimed Tess. "They don't grow on bushes like pea-pods."

"Oh, no, of course not!" ejaculated Dot, who did not like to be considered ignorant. "A frankfurter flies, doesn't it?"

"Mercy!" murmured Ruth. "Hear her!"

"Oh! I mean it crawls—it *creeps*. Of course," Dot hurried to add.

Agnes exploded here. She could not keep in any longer.

"Well, I think you're real mean!" complained Dot. "You won't tell me. I guess it's a fish, then. Does it *swim?*"

"Goodness!" cried Tess.

"Then they come in bunches like bananas!" declared the frantic Dot.

This was the worst yet. Agnes rolled on the matting of the bedroom and almost choked. Ruth herself was laughing heartily at her small sister as she gathered her into her arms and told her just how the sausage-meat was stuffed into the frankfurters' skins.

"Well!" murmured Dot, at last, and rather sleepily. "I don't care. I believe they are the very *nicest* things there are to eat—so there! Those the frankfurter man gave us were perfectly lovely."

That was what suggested the Frankfurter Party, and the Frankfurter Party was one of the very happiest thoughts that Ruth Kenway ever evolved. We shall have to hear about it, in another chapter.

CHAPTER XXI

MRS. BOBSTER'S MYSTERIOUS FRIEND

Rosa Wildwood quickly showed improvement after her arrival at Pleasant Cove. Under the ministrations of the little old woman who lived in a shoe the Southern girl could not help feeling a measure of contentment, if nothing else.

Her hostess was such a cheerful body! And, as Agnes had promised, Rosa was supplied with good, hearty food—and plenty of it.

There was a glass of warm milk, fresh from the cow, on the stand beside the head of her little chintz-hung bed every morning when Rosa awoke. For Mrs. Bobster was up and about by daybreak.

When Rosa came down to the sunlit kitchen, breakfast was ready and the little old woman who lived in a shoe declared she had all her "outside" chores done, saving her regular work in her garden.

Rosa sometimes helped about the housework. The doctor had told her that certain forms of housework would be good for her. But she had to be very exact and careful in doing the work about the shoe-house, for Mrs. Bobster was a New England housekeeper of the old school and was as methodical as Grandfather's Clock.

The girls from Milton did not neglect Rosa

Wildwood. At least, the Corner House girls and their friends did not. Pearl Harrod and the girls at Spoondrift Bungalow came with a wagonette and took her driving. The repairs had been made upon the bungalow and Pearl's party was there again—all but the Corner House girls.

Ruth had decided to stick to the tent for the remainder of their stay at Pleasant Cove. And Willowbend Camp was becoming the liveliest spot along the entire beach-front.

Ruth and her sisters came after Rosa and took her out in their boat. The boys who were living at Willowbend, too, took an interest in the frail Southern girl. For Rosa Wildwood, with the color stealing back into her cheeks and lips, and her eyes bright again, was a very attractive girl indeed!

Dot Kenway's birthday came at this time, and that was the date set for the Frankfurter Party. Dot's guesses about the origin and nature of the hearty and inviting, if not delicate, frankfurter, had delighted the campers who heard the story; and Dot's sisters and Neale spent some time and a good deal of ingenuity in preparing for the festive occasion.

Rosa came over to the tent colony and helped the girls prepare for the party. Moreover, she had a secret to impart to Ruth.

"Don't let the other girls hear, Ruth Kenway," she said, with much mystery. "But Mrs. Bobster is the oddest thing!"

"Well! I guess she is," laughed Ruth. "But she's *good.*"

"Good as gold," agreed Rosa. "But she has some funny ways. Of course I go to bed early. The doctor told me I should."

"Well?"

"You'd think she'd go to bed early, too, when she's up so soon in the morning?"

"Well——I suppose that's a matter of taste," Ruth observed.

"Anyway, you know how lonesome it is over there?"

"I guess there are not many people about—after dark."

"That's just it!" cried Rosa. "Mrs. Bobster scurries around and does all her out of doors chores before dark. And she locks and bolts all the doors. She is really afraid after dark."

Ruth nodded. She remembered how once the little old woman who lived in a shoe had spoken to her about being afraid.

"Well, she locks and bolts the doors," said Rosa, "and then we have supper and I go to bed. Sometimes, like a good child, I go right to sleep. Sometimes, like a bad child, I *don't.*"

"Well—what then?"

"Then I hear Mrs. Bobster talking. She has company. I never hear the company come in, or go out; but she has it every night."

"And never says anything about it?"

"Not a word," said Rosa. "I hinted once or

twice that she must have company every night, and all she said was that she didn't like sitting alone."

"Is it a man or a woman?" asked Ruth.

"I don't know," laughed Rosa. "That's one of the funny things about it. Although I hear Mrs. Bobster sometimes chattering like a magpie, I never hear an answer."

"What?" gasped Ruth, in amazement.

"That's right," said Rosa, nodding confidently. "Whoever it is talks so low that I haven't heard his, or her, voice yet!"

"A dumb person?" suggested Ruth.

"Maybe. At any rate, I couldn't tell you for the life of me whether it is a man or a woman that comes to see the little old woman who lives in a shoe. Isn't it odd, Ruth?"

"I should say it was," admitted Ruth.

"But she treats me well," sighed Rosa. "I wouldn't do her any harm for the world. But I *am* awfully curious!"

It was this day, too—the day of Dot's party—that the wooden-legged clam-digger came along through the Willowbend tent colony again. He always came to the tent of the Corner House girls when he appeared; Ruth was a regular customer, for she and her sisters were fond of shellfish.

"I'll have fifty to-day, Mr. Kuk," she said to the saltish individual when he hailed her from outside the tent. Ruth had learned that his name was Habakuk Somes; everybody along the beach

called him "Kuk," and Ruth, to be polite, tagged him with "Mister" in addition.

Tom Jonah appeared and showed his disapproval of the clam man by a throaty growl. "That thar dawg don't like me none too well," said the clam man. "What d'yeou call him?"

"Tom Jonah."

"Thet's enough to sink him," said the man with a grin. "How'd ye come ter call him that?"

"It's his name," said Ruth. "It was engraved on his collar when he came to our house in Milton."

"Oh! then he ain't allus been your dawg, shipmet?" demanded the man.

"No. He came to us. We don't know where from. But he is a gentleman, and he is going to stay with us as long as he will."

The clam man blinked, and said nothing more. But he cast more than one glance at Tom Jonah before he went away.

The preparations made for the birthday party included the purchase of a good many pounds of first quality frankfurters. And when they were delivered to the Corner House girls' tent, the fun began.

Tess and Dot were sent away for the morning to play with some of the children at Enterprise Camp. Then Ruth and Agnes and Rosa and Neale set to work to make frankfurters into the very funniest looking things that you could imagine!

With bits of tinsel and colored paper and pins and other small wares, the young folks set to work. They made frankfurters look like caricatures of all kinds of beasts and birds, and insects as well. One was the body of a huge, gaily-winged butterfly. Another was striped and horned like a worm of ferocious aspect.

They were made into fishes, with tails and fins. Neale made a nest with several "young" frankfurters poking their heads out for food, while the mother frankfurter was just poised upon the edge of the nest, her wings spread to balance her.

There were short-legged frankfurters, with long, flapping ears, like dachshunds, and long, stiff-legged frankfurters, with abbreviated tails, and appearing to gambol like lambs. There were several linked together and apparently creeping about like a species of jointed, horrid caterpillar.

Then they actually *were* bunched like bananas! while some grew, husked, like sweetcorn, and some had the green, fluffy tops of carrots cunningly fastened to them and were tied together as carrots are bunched in the market.

Neale's ingenuity, however, rose to its height when he stretched a slanting wire across the tent, higher than the partition, and made several "aeroplanes" with bodies of the succulent sausage, which he could start at one end of the wire to "fly" to the other end.

The young folks came to Willowbend Camp about five o'clock to enjoy the festivities. The

older Corner House girls, with the help of some of their friends, served the crowd a hearty supper, the main course of which was hot frankfurters, prepared by the "frankfurter man" whose acquaintance Tess and Dot had made.

When the fun was over the guests took the fancy-dressed sausages home as souvenirs.

Neale and Agnes and Ruth went home with Rosa, for it was a long walk, and part of the way it was lonely. One of the ladies who had chaperoned the party remained with Tess and Dot while their sisters were absent.

The young folk had a pleasant walk, for there was a moon. Coming finally in sight of the home of the little old woman who lived in a shoe, Ruth said to Rosa, who walked with her:

"It *is* a lonely spot, isn't it?"

"But I never feel afraid. Only I'm curious about Mrs. Bobster's friend——There! See it?" she cried, suddenly, but under her breath.

"See what?" Ruth asked.

"The shadow on the curtain," said Rosa.

At the same moment Agnes said: "Hello! Mrs. Bobster has company."

There was a lamp lit in the tiny front room of the cottage. Plainly silhouetted upon the white shade was a man sitting in a chair.

"What! With his hat on?" exclaimed Ruth. "Who can it be?"

"He isn't very polite, whoever he is," said Neale.

"Let's see about it," suggested Agnes. "Do you know anything about him, Rosa?"

"I only know she has had a visitor sometimes —after I'm in bed," said the Southern girl.

"Come on! let's go in the side door," said Agnes, in a low voice.

But when they had tiptoed to the door they found it locked. Rosa laughed. "I tell you she never leaves a door or window unfastened after dark," she said.

They heard the little old woman who lived in a shoe coming to the door to let them in. But Rosa had to assure her who it was before Mrs. Bobster unlocked the door.

"But you had company?" said Agnes, rather pertly.

"Eh?" returned Mrs. Bobster, setting the broom behind the hall door. "Oh, yes! I don't never kalkerlate ter be alone many evenings."

"Is he here now?" demanded Neale, laughing.

"Who? *Him?* No," said the widow, calmly. "He's bashful. He went out jest as you young folks come in. Sit right down, children, an' I'll find a pitcher of milk an' some cookies."

The Corner House girls and Rosa—to say nothing of Neale O'Neil—were amazed. They looked at each other wonderingly as the widow bustled out to the pantry.

"I'd give a penny," murmured Rosa Wildwood, "to know who her mysterious friend is."

CHAPTER XXII

THE YARN OF THE "SPANKING SAL"

The wooden-legged clam digger, Habakuk Somes, seemed suddenly to have acquired a great interest in Tom Jonah.

He appeared almost every day at the tent of the Corner House girls and did his best to become friendly with the dog. Tom Jonah grew used to his presence, but he would allow no familiarities from the dilapidated waterside character.

The girls thought "Kuk" Somes only queer; the boys "joshed" him a good deal. Nobody minded having him around, considering merely that he was a peculiar fellow, and harmless.

His tales of sea-going and sea-roving were wonderful indeed. How much of them was truth and how much pure invention, the older Corner House girls and Neale O'Neil did not know. However, they forgave his "historical inaccuracies" because of the entertainment they derived from his yarns.

Tess and Dot listened to the old fellow with perfect confidence in his achievements. Had he not known—in a moment—what it was that shot water up through the holes in the clam flat? The smaller girls listened to old Kuk Somes with unshaken confidence.

"And how did the pirates get your leg, Mr. Kuk?" asked Tess. "Your really truly leg, I mean."

She and Dot were sitting on the edge of the tent-platform, under the awning, with their bare feet in the sand, with Tom Jonah lying comfortably between them. The dog had a brooding eye upon the clam digger, who sat on a broken lobster trap a few feet away.

"Huh! them pi-*rats?*" queried the clam digger. "Well—er—now, did I say it was pi-*rats* as got my leg, shipmet?"

"Yes, you did, sir." Dot hastened to bolster up her sister's statement of fact. "And you said it was on the Spanish Main."

"Well!" declared the old man, "so it was, an' so they did. Pi-*rats* it was, shipmet. An' I'll tell yer the how of it.

"I was carpenter's mate on the *Spankin' Sal,* what sailed from Bosting to Rio, touchin' at some West Injy ports on the way—pertic'larly Porto Rico, which is a big merlasses port. We had a good part of our upper holt stowed with warmin' pans for the merlasses planters——"

"Oh, Mr. Kuk!" ejaculated Tess in rather a pained voice. "Isn't that a mistake? *Warming pans?*"

"Not by a joblot it ain't no mistake!" returned the old man. "Warming pans I sez, an' warming pans I sticks to."

"But my geogoraphy," Tess ventured, timidly,

and mispronouncing the word as usual, "says that the West Indies are tropical. Porto Rico is near the Equator."

"Now, ain't that wonderful—jest wonderful?" declared the clam digger, smiting his knee with his palm. "Shows what it is to be book l'arned, shipmet.

" 'Course, *I* knowed them was tropical places, but I didn't know 'twas all writ down in books —joggerfries, do they call 'em?"

"Yes, sir," said Tess, seriously. "And it is so hot down there they couldn't possibly need warming pans."

"Now, ye'd think that, wouldn't ye, shipmet? And I'd think it. But the skipper of the *Spankin' Sal,* he knowed dif'rent.

"A master brainy man was Captain Roebuck. That was his name—Roebuck," declared the clam digger, solemnly. "Hev you ever seen a warming pan, shipmet—an' old fashioned warmin' pan?"

"Oh, yes!" cried Tess and Dot together. "There's one hangs over the mantelpiece in the sitting-room of the old Corner House," added Tess. "That's where we live when we're at home in Milton.

"And it is a round brass pan, with a cover that has holes in it, and a long handle. Mrs. MacCall says folks used to put live coals in it and iron the beds before folks went to bed, in the cold

weather. But we got furnace heat now, and don't need the warming pan."

"Surely, surely, shipmet," agreed the clam digger. "Them's the things. And Cap'n Roebuck of the *Spankin' Sal,* plagued near crammed the upper holt with them.

"It looks right foolish, shipmet; but that skipper got a chancet ter buy up a whole lot o' them brass warmin' pans cheap. If he'd seen 'em cheap enough, he'd bought up a hull cargo of secon' hand hymn books, and he'd took 'em out to the heathen in the South Seas and made a profit on 'em—he would that!" pursued Kuk, confidently.

"He must have been a wonderful man, sir," said Tess, while Dot sat round-eyed and listened.

"Wonderful! wonderful!" agreed the clam digger. "But about them warmin' pans. When we got ter Porto Rico we broke out the first of them things. Looked right foolish. All them dons in Panama hats and white pants, an' barefooted comin' aboard to look over samples of tradin' stock, an' all they can see is warmin' pans.

"'What's them things for?' axed the first planter, in the Spanish lingo.

"'Them's skimmers,' says Cap'n Roebuck, knowin' it warn't no manner o' use to try to explain the exact truth to a man what ain't never seed snow, or knowed there was a zero mark on the almanack.

"He grabbed up one o' them warmin' pans and made a swing with it like you'd use a crab-net. 'See! See!' says the dons. 'Skim-a da merlasses.' That's Spanish for 'Yes, yes! skim the merlasses,'" explained Kuk, seriously.

"'But what's the cover for?' axed the don. 'Ye don't hafter have no cover,' says Cap'n Roebuck, and he yanks the cover off the warmin' pan an' throws it away.

"And there them dons had the finest merlasses dipper that ever went inter the islan's. Cap'n Roebuck seen their eyes snap an' put a good, stiff price on the things, and inside of a week there warn't a warmin' pan left on the *Spankin' Sal.*

"Then," pursued the clam digger, "we stowed away in our upper holt goods what would bring a fancy price at Rio, and laid our course for the Amazon.

"But we was all hands mighty worritted," admitted Kuk, lowering his voice mysteriously. "Ye see, ye never could tell in them old days, an' in the West Injies, who it was safe to trust, an' who it was safe ter *dis*-trust.

"Yer see, so many of them snaky Spanish planters was hand an' glove with the pi-*rats.* And ev'rybody on the island knowed the *Spankin' Sal* was takin' away a great treasure that had been exchanged for them warmin' pans. We was a fair mark, as ye might say, for them pi-*rats.*"

"Oh!" gasped Dot, hugging her Alice-doll the tighter.

"How much treasure was there, Mr. Kuk?" asked the ever-practical Tess.

"A chist full," announced the clam digger without a moment's hesitation. "A reg'lar treasure-chist full. All them planters hadn't had ready cash money to pay for the warmin' pans, and they'd give in exchange di'monds and other jools —and the exchange rates for American money was high anyway. So the *Spankin' Sal* was a mighty good ketch if the pi-*rats* ketched her.

"So, when we sailed from Porto Rico we kep' a weather eye open for black-painted schooners with rakin' masts an' skulls and shinbones on their flags. When we seed them signs we'd know they was pi-*rats,*" declared Kuk, gravely.

The small Corner House girls sighed in unison —and in delight! "The plot thickens!" whispered Agnes to Ruth behind the flap of the tent where they were listening, likewise, though unbeknown to Kuk and the children.

"Go on, please, Mr. Kuk," breathed Tess.

"Oh, do!" said Dot.

"Well, shipmets," said the old clam digger, "bein' peaceful merchantmen, as ye might say, we hadn't shipped aboard the *Spankin' Sal* to fight no pi-*rats,*" declared Kuk, with energy. "We wasn't no sogers, and we told the skipper so.

" 'We'll fight,' says I. Bein' an officer—carpenter's mate, as I told ye—I was spokesman for the crew. 'But we wants ter fight with weepons as we air fermiliar with. Let you and the ossifers

fire the cannon, skipper,' says I, 'and give us fellers that was bred along shore an' on the farms some o' them scythes out'n the lower holt.

"'Cutlasses an' muskets,' says I, 'is all right for them as has been brought up with 'em,' says I, 'but, skipper, me an' my shipmets has been better used ter cuttin' swamp-grass an' mowin' oats. Give us the weepons we air fermiliar with.'

"And he done it," declared Kuk, wagging his sinful old head. "We broke out some cases of scythes and fixed 'em onto their handles after grindin' of 'em sharp as razers on the grin'stone in the waist of the *Spankin' Sal.*

"Pretty soon we seen one o' them black-hulled schooners comin'. She couldn't be mistook for anythin' but a pi-*rat,* although she didn't fly no black flag yet.

"'Let 'em come to close quarters, skipper,' says I. 'Let 'em board us. Then me an' my shipmets can git 'em on the short laig. We'll mow 'em down like weeds along a roadside ditch.'

"He done it, an' we did," pursued Kuk, rather heated now with the interest of his own narrative. "When they run their schooner alongside of us and the two ships clinched, and they broke out the black flag at their peak, me an' my shipmets stood there ready to repel boarders.

"Them pi-*rats,*" proceeded Kuk, "fought like a passel of cats—tooth an' nail! They come over aour bulwarks jest like peas pourin' out o' a sack.

'Steady, lads!' I sings out. 'Take a long, sweepin' stroke, an' each o' ye cut a good swath!'

"An' we done so," the clam digger said, nodding. "Our scythes was longer than the cutlasses of them pi-*rats;* and before they could git at us, we'd reach 'em with a side-swipe of the scythes, and mow 'em down like ripe hay."

"Oh, dear, me!" gasped Dot.

"How awful!" murmured Tess.

" 'Twas sartain sure a bloody field of battle," declared the clam digger, nodding again. "If it hadn't been for my leg I wouldn't never have fought no pi-*rats* again. A man has his feelin's, ye see. Our scuppers run blood. The enemy was piled along the deck under our bulwarks in a reg'-lar windrow."

"And did you kill them *all*—every one?" demanded Tess, in amazement.

"No. We jest cut 'em down for the most part," explained Kuk. "Ye see, we cut a low swath with our scythes; mostly we mowed off their feet and mebbe their legs purty near to their knees. After that there battle there was a most awful lot o' wooden legged pi-*rats* on the Spanish Main.

"An' *that,*" declared the clam digger, rising and getting ready to move on, "was the main reason why I left the sea; leastwise I never wanted to go sailin' much in them parts again.

"In the scrimmage I got a shot in this leg as busted my knee-cap. I kep' hoppin' 'round on

that busted leg as long as there was any pi-*rats* to mow down; and I did the knee a lot of harm the doctors in the horspital said.

"So I had ter have the leg ampertated. That made folks down that a-way ax me was I a pi-*rat*, too. I'm a sensitive man," said Kuk, wagging his head, "an' it hurt my feelin's to be classed in with all them wooden-legged fellers as we mowed down in the *Spankin' Sal.* So I come hum an' left the sea for good and all," concluded Habakuk Somes, and at once pegged off with his clam basket on his arm.

"What an awful, *awful* story!" cried Dot.

"Too awful to believe," answered Tess, wisely.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SHADOW

The four Corner House girls planned to start for town one morning early, and they were going by road instead of by boat.

Agnes ran over to the boys' tents to ask Neale O'Neil to see that their fresh fish was put upon the ice in the icebox when the fishman came; and she found Neale doing duty on the housekeeping staff that morning, being busily engaged in shaking up the pillows and beating mattresses in the sun. The latter exertion was particularly for the dislodgment of the ubiquitous sandflea!

"Hello, Ag! What's the good word?" cried Neale.

Agnes told him what they were going to do and asked the favor.

"I'll see that you get the fish all right," Neale agreed. "But what about the iceman? He'll never come near your tent with Tom Jonah there."

"Tom Jonah is going with us," Agnes said, promptly. "Did you suppose we'd leave him all day alone, poor fellow?"

When they started Tom Jonah showed his delight at being included in the girls' outing by the

most extravagant gyrations. As they went up the shaded lane toward the auto-stage road, he chased half a dozen imaginary rabbits into the woods in as many minutes.

It was right at the head of the lane that they met the man. He was not a bad looking man at all, and he was driving a nice horse to a rubber-tired runabout.

He drew in the horse, that seemed to have already traveled some miles that morning, and looked hard at Tom Jonah.

"Well," he said, cheerfully, "there's the old tramp himself. How long have you girls had him?"

The four Corner House girls stood stock-still, and even Ruth was smitten dumb for the moment.

"Tom Jonah, you rascal!" said the man, not unkindly. "Don't you know your old master?"

At first the dog had not seen him; but the moment he heard the man's voice, he halted and his whole body stiffened. The plume of his tail began to wave; his jaws stretched wide in a doggish smile. Then, as the man playfully snapped the whip at him, Tom Jonah barked loudly.

"Where did you get him?" the man repeated, looking at the Corner House girls again.

Tess and Dot were clinging to each other's hands. Agnes stared at the man belligerently. Ruth said—and her voice was not quite steady:

"Do you think you know Tom Jonah, sir?"

"What do you think yourself, Miss?" responded

the man, rather gruffly. "I guess there's no mistake about whether he knows me and I know him."

"No, sir," said Ruth, bravely. "But lots of people may know him."

"Do you mean to put in a claim for the dog?" interrupted the man, quickly.

"Tom Jonah came to our house in Milton," began Ruth, when again the man interrupted with:

"Of course. He was on his way home to me. I sold him to a man who lives forty miles beyond Milton."

"Then you do *not* own him?" Ruth said, with a feeling of relief.

The man looked at her steadily for a minute. Ruth had recovered her self-possession. Tess and Dot were now on either side of Tom Jonah, with their arms about the dog's neck. Agnes was very angry, but remained silent.

"I raised that dog from a pup, Miss. I owned his mother. I raised him. I put his name on his collar. He has it there yet, hasn't he?"

"Yes, sir," admitted Ruth.

"He's always been a good dog. He's a gentleman if ever a dog was! He had the run of the house. My wife and the girls made a great pet of him. But by and by they said he was too big and clumsy for the house. They have a couple of little *fice*—lap-poodles, or the like. Tom Jonah was put out, and he got jealous. Yes, sir!" and the man laughed. "Just as jealous as a human."

"Oh!" gasped Agnes. She *disliked* that man!

"My name's Reynolds," said the man. "Everybody knows me about Shawmit. I run a lumber-yard there.

"Well! Tom Jonah got to running away to the neighbors. Stayed a while with one, then with another. Always liked kids, Tom Jonah did, and he'd stay longest where there were kids in the family.

"But it got to be a nuisance. I didn't know whether the dog belonged to me or somebody else. So I sold him to a relative of my wife's who came on visiting us, and took a fancy to Tom Jonah, and who lives—as I said—forty miles beyond Milton. So the old fellow was on his way back home when you took him in, eh?"

"He came to us at Milton," Ruth replied. "He wanted to stay. I brought him down here to take care of my little sisters. We're living in a tent down on the shore yonder——"

"And we're going to keep him!" interrupted Agnes, angrily.

"Hush! Be still, Aggie!" begged Ruth, in a low tone.

"You don't claim you bought him, I suppose?" said the man who called himself Reynolds.

"But we *will!*" cried Ruth, instantly. "We will gladly pay for him."

"Oh, he's not for sale again," laughed the man. "I sold him once and he wouldn't stay sold, you see."

"Then he doesn't belong to you now, any more

than he does to us, really," Ruth hastened to say.

"Well——that's so, I suppose," admitted the man.

"We won't give Tom Jonah up to anybody," said Agnes again.

Dot was crying and Tess could scarcely keep from following her lead. Tom Jonah stood solemnly, his eyes very bright, his tail waving slowly. He looked from the girls to the man in the runabout, and back again. He knew they were discussing him; but he did not know just what it was all about.

"If we have to," said Ruth, with much more confidence in her voice than she felt in her heart, "we will give Tom Jonah up to the person who really owns him. We do not know you, sir. We do not know if what you say is true. You must prove it."

"Well! I like that!" said the man in a tone that showed he did not like it at all. "You are a pretty pert young lady, you are. I guess I'll take my own dog home. I heard he was over here to the beach and I drove over particularly to get him."

"Take him, then!" exclaimed Ruth, desperately. "If Tom Jonah will go with you, all right. You call him."

"Come here, boy!" commanded the man.

Tom Jonah did not move. Ruth took a hand of each of the smaller girls and led them away from the big dog.

"Come, children," she said. "We'll go on. If Tom Jonah really loves us, he'll come, too."

The dog whined. He looked from the red-faced, angry man to the four girls who loved him so well.

"Come here, Tom Jonah!" commanded the man again. He had turned his horse and was evidently headed for home. "Come, sir!"

The Corner House girls were moving sadly away. Agnes glanced back and actually made a face at the man in the runabout. Fortunately he did not see it.

"Come on, Tom Jonah!" said the man for the third time.

The dog was perplexed. He showed it plainly. He started after the man; he started back for the girls. He whined and he barked. He was torn by the conflicting emotions in his doggish soul.

"What's the matter with him?" exclaimed the man, and snapped his whiplash at Tom Jonah.

At that, Dot uttered a shriek of anguish. Tess burst into tears. Agnes started back as though to protect the dog. Even Ruth could not forbear to utter a cry.

"Here, Tom Jonah! here, sir!" Agnes shouted. "Come on, you dear old fellow."

The dog barked, circled the moving carriage once, and then raced down the road toward the Corner House girls. The man shouted and snapped his whip. Tom Jonah did not even look back at him when he caught up with the girls.

The dog was perplexed. He started after the man; he started back for the girls. He whined and he barked.

"Hurry up! let's run with him, Ruthie," begged Agnes.

But there was no need of that. The man did not turn his horse and follow. He was quickly out of sight and Tom Jonah gave no sign of wishing to follow his old master.

The incident troubled the Corner House girls vastly. Even Ruth was devoted to the good old dog by this time. If he were taken away by this Mr. Reynolds, it would be like losing one of the Corner House family.

Ruth feared that Mr. Reynolds would find some legal way of getting possession of Tom Jonah. She wished Mr. Howbridge were here to advise them what to do. She even wished now that she had not brought Tom Jonah to Pleasant Cove to act as their "chaperon."

The smaller girls dried their eyes after a time. Agnes, "breathing threatenings," as Ruth said, promised Tess and Dot that the man never should take Tom Jonah away. But Ruth wondered what they would do about it if Mr. Reynolds came to Willowbend Camp with a police constable and a warrant for the dog?

And, too, who had sent Mr. Reynolds word that Tom Jonah was at the beach? He particularly said that he had been informed of the fact. It seemed to Ruth that the informer must be their enemy.

Then, out of a dust cloud that had been drawing

near the Corner House girls for some few moments, appeared the forefront of a big touring car. In it were Trix Severn and some of her friends from the Overlook House.

"Oh! there's Trix!" murmured Agnes to her older sister.

The hotel-keeper's daughter would not look at the Corner House girls. She, certainly, had proved herself their enemy. Ruth wondered if Trix had had anything to do with bringing Mr. Reynolds to Pleasant Cove, searching for his dog.

Ruth knew that the hotel-keeper's daughter often rode over to Shawmit; she was probably on her way there now with her party. And after the way Trix had acted at the time the Spoondrift bungalow was burned, one might expect anything mean of Trix. For once Ruth allowed her suspicions to color her thoughts.

"She has awfully good times, just the same," murmured Agnes.

"Who does?" demanded Ruth, tartly.

"Trix."

"I declare!" exclaimed Ruth, with more vexation than she usually displayed. "I'd be ashamed that I ever knew her after the way she's acted. And I believe, Agnes, that we can thank her for setting that man after Tom Jonah."

"Oh, Ruth! Do you believe so?"

"I do," said the older Corner House girl, and she explained why she thought so.

Mr. Severn bought many of his supplies in

Shawmit, and Trix was forever running over there in the car. It did not strain one's imagination very much to picture Trix hearing about Mr. Reynolds' dog and recognizing Tom Jonah from the description. Besides, the Severns had been coming to Pleasant Cove for several seasons, and Trix might easily have seen the dog when he lived with his first master.

"Oh, dear me!" sighed Agnes. "It does seem too bad that one's very *best* friends sometimes turn out to be one's enemies. Who'd have thought Trix Severn would do such a thing?"

"Of course, we don't *know,*" admitted Ruth, trying to be fair. "But who else could have told Mr. Reynolds about Tom Jonah?"

Ruth went into the first store in the village that sold such things and bought a new leash. This she snapped into the ring of his collar and made the old dog walk beside them more decorously.

Tess and Dot could scarcely keep from hugging him all the time; they wanted Ruth to agree to take the very next train back to Milton, for they thought with the dog once at the old Corner House, nobody could take him away from them.

"I didn't like that man at all, anyway," Tess declared. "He had red whiskers."

"Is—is that a sign that a man's real mean if he has red whiskers, Tess?" asked Dot, wonderingly.

"It's a sign Tess doesn't like him," laughed Agnes. "But I don't like that Reynolds man myself. Do you, Ruthie?"

"We're all agreed on that point I should hope," said Ruth. "But we won't run away with Tom Jonah. If that man comes for him again, I'll find some way to circumvent him. The good old dog belongs to us, if he does to anybody. And as long as he wants to live with us, he shall. So now!"

The other Corner House girls finally forgot their worriment about Tom Jonah. Ruth warned them not to talk about it to the girls they met. They did their errands in the village and then went on to Spoondrift bungalow where they spent a very enjoyable day.

Neale O'Neil and Joe Eldred came after supper to escort the Corner House girls back to Willow-bend Camp. Tess and Dot had taken a nap during the afternoon, so were not a drag on the procession, going home.

They went around by the home of the little old woman who lived in the shoe. Ruth and Agnes had been talking with the boys about the mystery of the strange girl who had shared in the adventures of Tess and Dot on Wild Goose Island. They all agreed she must be a Gypsy; but Ruth had kept to herself the knowledge of the girl's identity as the Gypsy "queen."

"I saw several of the Gypsies about the beach to-day," Joe Eldred said. "That snaky, scarred-faced fellow was one of them."

"He's the ring-leader, I believe," Ruth hastened to say.

"Can't just see what they are after, hanging

about here," Neale observed. "There isn't much to steal. Everybody's brought just the oldest things they own down here to the beach."

"And there are no hens to steal," chuckled Agnes.

"I bet none of them will come near the tents while Tom Jonah is on guard," Neale added, snapping his fingers for the dog who was running ahead in the moonlit path.

Suddenly Tom Jonah stopped and growled. They had arrived in sight of the queer little cottage where Rosa Wildwood lived with Mrs. Bobster. The young folk could even see the drawn shade of the sitting-room window.

"There's that man again!" exclaimed Agnes.

"What man?" Joe Eldred asked.

"Mrs. Bobster's mysterious friend," giggled Agnes. "See his shadow on the curtain?"

"And he's sitting there with his hat on," murmured Neale.

But it was Ruth who saw the other—and more important—shadow. This was the figure of a tall man slipping along the outer side of Mrs. Bobster's picket fence. It was *this* shadow at which Tom Jonah was growling.

The man came to the gate, opened it softly, and stole in. His furtive movements gave the big dog his cue. He leaped forward, barking vociferously, leaped the fence, and followed the running figure around the corner of the house.

Mrs. Bobster shrieked—the young folk outside

could hear her. But her "company" did not move. He still sat there with his derby hat on.

The boys started after the dog. The girls stood, clinging to one another's hands, at the corner of the fence.

From around the house appeared another running figure; but this was a girl. She flung herself headlong over the fence, and her skirt caught on a picket. Ruth ran forward to release her.

"Oh, my dear!" she gasped. "Where did you come from?"

It was the girl she had first noticed in the train with the Gypsy woman—the very girl who had been on Wild Goose Island with Tess and Dot. It was she who had masqueraded as Zaliska, the Gypsy queen.

CHAPTER XXIV

BROUGHT TO BOOK

"Let me go! Let me go!" gasped the girl in Ruth's arms. "He will get me."

"Who'll get you?" demanded the wondering Agnes.

"Big Jim, the Gypsy. He's after me," said the strange girl.

"And Tom Jonah and the boys are after *him,*" declared Ruth. "Don't you fret; Big Jim won't come back here."

"Who *is* she, Ruth?" asked Agnes.

"Never mind who I am," said the girl, rather sharply. "Let me go."

"I know why you were lurking about here," Ruth said, calmly. "You heard that Rosa Wildwood is stopping here."

"Well?" demanded the other.

"Then you are June Wildwood. You're her sister. I don't know how you came to be with those Gypsies, and masquerading as an old woman——"

"My goodness!" gasped Agnes. "Was *she* that Gypsy queen?"

"Yes," Ruth said, confidently. "Now, weren't you?" to the strange girl. "And aren't you Rosa's sister who ran away two years ago?"

"Oh, I am! I am!" groaned the girl.

"Well, Rosa's just crazy to see you. And your father has been searching for you everywhere," said Ruth, quickly. "You must come in and see Rosa. There's Mrs. Bobster opening the front door."

The shadow of the man with the derby hat on his head still was motionless upon the shade; but the widow had opened the front door on its chain, and now demanded:

"Who's there? what do you want?"

"It's only me, Mrs. Bobster," cried Ruth.

Tess and Dot were already running toward the cottage door. "Oh, Mrs. Bobster!" Tess cried, "here's the girl that helped us on the island—me and Dot."

"And my Alice-doll," concluded Dot, likewise excited. "And Ruthie says she's Rosa's sister."

"For the good land of liberty's sake!" ejaculated Mrs. Bobster, throwing wide the door. "Come in! Come in!"

The girl whom Ruth had seized hesitated for a moment. Ruth whispered in her ear:

"Rosa is wearing her heart out for you, June Wildwood. And your father isn't drinking any more. He has a steady job. You come back to them and you needn't be afraid of those Gypsies."

"They'll try to get me back. Doc. Raynes' wife was one of them. The old doctor died a year ago, and since then I've been with that gang," said June Wildwood.

"Were the doctor and his wife the folks you ran away with?"

"Yes. I danced and sang and dressed up in character to help entertain their audiences when he sold bitters and salve," the girl explained. "The old doctor treated me all right. But these thieving Gypsies are different. Mrs. Doc. Raynes is Big Jim's sister."

"Don't you be afraid of them any more. We'll set the police after them," Ruth declared. "Where have you been since the day my sisters were with you?"

"I've been washing dishes at a hotel here in Pleasant Cove. But I kept under cover. I was afraid of them," said the girl.

They reached the door then, and went into the cottage. Mrs. Bobster ushered them right into the sitting-room and at once all the girls halted in amazement. There was an armchair standing between the window and the center table, where the lamp sat. Leaning against the chair was the broom, and on the business end of that very useful household implement was a hat that had probably once belonged to the husband of the little old woman who lived in a shoe.

"My goodness sake!" ejaculated Agnes, the first to get her breath. "Then it was not company you had at all, Mrs. Bobster?"

"No," said the widow, in a business-like way, removing the hat from the broom and standing the latter in the corner. "But I didn't want folks to

know it. There's some stragglers around here after dark, and I wanted 'em to think there was a man in the house."

At that moment Rosa Wildwood came running downstairs in wrapper and slippers. "I heard her! I heard her!" she shrieked, and the next moment the two sisters were hugging each other frantically.

Explanations were in order; and it took some time for the little old lady who lived in a shoe to understand the reunion of her boarder and the girl who had lived with the Gypsies.

The boys and Tom Jonah came back, having chased the lurking Big Jim for quite a mile through the woods. "And Tom Jonah brought back a piece of his coat-tail," chuckled Neale O'Neil. "He can consider himself lucky that the dog didn't bite deeper!"

"I guess that dog doesn't like Gypsies," said June Wildwood, patting Tom Jonah's head.

The boys were just as much interested as their girl friends in the reunion of Rosa and her sister. Meanwhile Mrs. Bobster bustled about and found the usual pitcher of cool milk and a great platter of cookies. The young folk feasted beyond reason while they all talked.

Ruth arranged with the little old woman who lived in a shoe to let June stay with her sister, and she promised June, as well, that if she would return to Milton with Rosa, employment would be found for her so that she could be self-supporting,

yet live at home with Rosa and Bob Wildwood.

The Corner House girls offered to leave Tom Jonah to guard the premises for that night. But Mrs. Bobster said:

"I reckon I won't be scaret none with two great girls in the house with me. Besides, when I am asleep, being lonesome don't bother me none—no, ma'am!"

"Well, we don't know how long we're going to have old Tom Jonah ourselves," sighed Agnes, as the party bound for the tent colony started on again.

"How's that?" demanded Neale, quickly.

They told him about the man named Reynolds, from Shawmit, and the claim he had made to the big dog. Neale was equally troubled with the Corner House girls over this, and he advised Ruth and Agnes to take the dog wherever they went.

"Don't give the fellow a chance to find Tom Jonah alone, or with the little girls," said Neale. "I don't believe he can get the dog legally without considerable trouble. And Tom Jonah has shown whom he likes best."

This uncertainty about Tom Jonah, however, did not keep the Corner House girls from continuing their good times at Pleasant Cove. With one of the ladies of the tent colony for chaperon the girls and their boy friends had many a "junket"—up the river, down the bay, and even outside upon the open sea.

It was on one of these latter occasions that

Ruth and Agnes joined Neale and his friends on the "double-ender," *Hattie G.,* and with her crew spent a night and a day chasing the elusive sword-fish.

That *was* an adventure; and one not soon to be forgotten by the older Corner House girls. Of course Tess and Dot were too small to go on this trip and they were fast asleep in one of the neighboring tents when Neale O'Neil came and scratched on the canvas of that in which Ruth and Agnes slept.

"Oh!" gasped Agnes. "What's that!"

"Is that you, Neale?" demanded Ruth, calmly.

"Of course. Get a bustle on," advised the boy. "The motorboat will be ready in ten minutes."

"Mercy!" ejaculated Agnes, giggling. "You know we don't wear bustles, Neale. They are too old-fashioned for anything."

She and Ruth quickly dressed. There wasn't much "prinking and preening" before the mirror on this morning, that was sure. In ten minutes the two Corner House girls were running down the beach, with their bags (packed over-night) and their rain-coats over their arms. Tom Jonah raced after them.

Everywhere save on the beach itself the shadows lay deep. There was no moon and the stars twinkled high overhead—spangles sewed on the black-velvet robe of Night.

Out upon the quietly heaving waters sounded voices—then the pop of a launch engine.

"Come on!" urged Neale's voice. "They're getting the boat ready, girls."

"But we're not going out to the banks in the *Nimble Shanks*—surely!" cried Agnes.

"No. But we're going down the cove in her to catch the *Hattie G.* Skipper Joline sent up a rocket for us half an hour ago. The tide's going out. He won't wait long, I assure you."

"It would be lots more comfortable to go all the way in the motorboat—wouldn't it?" asked Ruth, stepping into the skiff after Agnes and the dog.

"Skipper Joline would have a fit," laughed Joe Eldred. "A motorboat engine would scare every swordfish within a league of the Banks—so *he* says. He declares *that* is what makes them so hard to catch the last few seasons. These motorboats running about the sea are a greater nuisance than the motor cars ashore—so he declares."

"I suppose the swordfish shy at the motorboats just like the horses shy at automobiles?" giggled Agnes, as Neale and Joe pushed off and seized the oars.

"Yep," grunted Neale O'Neil. "And the motorboats have frightened all the horse-mackerel away. That's a joke. I'll tell the Skipper *that.*"

Several shadowy figures—being those of the other boys and Mr. and Mrs. Stryver, who were members of the swordfishing party, too—were spied about the deck and cockpit of the *Nimble Shanks.* The boys shot the skiff in beside the

motorboat and helped the girls aboard. Then they moored the skiff to the motorboat's buoy and soon the *Nimble Shanks* was away, down the cove.

It was past two o'clock—the darkest minutes of a summer's morning. Seaward, a light haze hung over the water—seemingly a veil of mist let down from the sky to shut out the view of all distant objects from the out-sailing mariners.

As the party neared the fishing fleet, voices carried flatly across the water, and now and then a dog barked. Tom Jonah answered these canines ashore with explosive growls. He stood forward, his paws planted firmly on the deck, and snuffing the sea air. Tom Jonah was a good sailor.

"Got your scare?" a voice came out of the darkness, quavering across the cove. "Going to be thick outside."

Neale grabbed the fish-horn and blew a mighty blast on it. Similar horns answered from all about the fleet.

A towering mast, with its big sail bending to the breeze, shot past them—the big cat-boat, *Susie*, bound for her lines of lobster-pots just off the mouth of the cove. Her crew hailed the launch and her party—four sturdy young fellows in jerseys and high sea-boots.

"Whew!" said Joe. "Smell that lobster bait! I'd hate to go for a pleasure trip on the *Susie*."

The *Hattie G* was just ahead and Mr. Stryver shut off the engine. The drab, dirty looking old craft tugged sharply at her taut mooring cable.

She had two short masts, and on these heavy canvas was being spread by the crew, which consisted of five men and a boy.

One of the men was the skipper, another the mate, a third the cook; but all hands had to turn to to make sail. There were several sweeps (heavy oars) held in bights of rope along the rail. Both ends of the *Hattie G.* were sharp; in other words she had two bows. Thus the name, "double-ender"—a build of craft now almost extinct save in a few New England ports out of which ply the swordfishermen.

Skipper Joline came to the rail. He was a hoarse, red-faced man with a white beard, cut like a paintbrush, on his chin.

"Climb aboard, folks," he said. "Steve will get breakfast shortly. There's a bit of fog and some swell outside. Better all lay in a good foundation of scouse and sody biscuit. Ye'll need it later."

"That sounds rather suggestive, Ruth," whispered Agnes. "Do you suppose he expects us landlubbers to be really *sick?*"

"I hope not," replied her sister. "But I don't care! I'm going to eat that breakfast if it kills me! I was never so hungry in all my life before."

They left the *Nimble Shanks* moored at the double-ender's anchor-buoy, and the latter lurched away on the short leg of her tack for the entrance to the cove. There was a fresh breeze and the

water began to sing under the sharp bows of the *Hattie G.*

The cook got busy in the galley and the fragrance of coffee and fried fish smothered all other smells about the craft—for it must be confessed that the double-ender had an ancient and fishy smell of her own that was not altogether pleasant to the nostrils of a fastidious person.

These hearty boys and girls were out for fun, however, and they had been long enough at Pleasant Cove to get used to most fishy odors. Before breakfast was over the *Hattie G.* had run through the "Breach," as the cove entrance was called, and they were sailing straight out to sea.

The mournful wail of a horn in the fog now and then announced the location of some lobsterman. The *Hattie G.* answered these "scares" with her own horn and swept on through the fog.

But now the mist began to lift. A golden glow rose, increased, and spread all along the eastern horizon. Suddenly they shot out of the fog and sailed right into the bright path of the rising sun.

This wonderful sight of sunrise at sea delighted Ruth and Agnes intensely. It was just as though they had sailed suddenly into a new world.

The fog masked the land astern. Ahead was nothing but the heaving, greenish-gray waves, foam-streaked at their crowns to the distant skyline, with only a few sails crossing the line of vision. Not a speck of land marred the seascape.

Later, when the *Hattie G.* reached the Banks,

there was something beside the view to interest and excite the Corner House girls.

The big sails were lowered and only a riding sail spread to keep the *Hattie G.* on an even keel. A "pulpit" was set up on each of her short booms —both fore and aft.

At the top of a mast was rigged a barrel-like thing in which the lookout stood with a glass, on the watch for the swordfish.

These can only be caught asleep on the surface of the sea. When one is sighted either the sails are hoisted, or the sweeps are used, to bring the vessel near enough for the skipper or his mate to make a cast of the harpoon.

Once one of the huge fish was spied, everybody aboard the *Hattie G.* was on the *qui vive.* The boys climbed the ratlines to see. The girls borrowed the cook's old-fashioned spyglass to get a better view of the creature.

The *Hattie G.* was brought softly near the fish. Skipper Joline had warned his guests to keep quiet. Ruth kept her hand upon Tom Jonah's collar so that he should not disturb the proceedings.

The skipper stepped into the pulpit—a framework of iron against which he leaned when he cast the harpoon. All was ready for the supreme moment.

The coil of the line was laid behind him. The crew brought the *Hattie G.* just to the spot Skipper Joline indicated with a wave of his hand.

Back swung the mighty arm of the skipper, the

muscles swelling like cables under the sleeve of his blue jersey.

"Now!" breathed the mate, as eager as any of the boys or girls among the spectators.

Ping!

The skipper had let drive. The harpoon sank deeply into the fish. For a brief instant they saw blood spurt out and dye the sea.

Then the huge fish leaped almost its length from the sea. The crew drove the *Hattie G.* back. Good reason why the swordfishing craft are built sharp at both ends!

How the fish thrashed and fought! Its sword beat the water to foam. Had it found the double-ender, the latter's bottom-planks would have been no protection against the creature's blows.

A swordfish has been known to thrust its weapon through the bottom of a boat and break it off in its struggles to get free.

"Oh, Agnes!" gasped Ruth, when the fight was over and the huge fish killed. "Who would ever believe, while buying a slice of swordfish, that it was so dangerous to capture one of the creatures?"

The crew of the *Hattie G.* got four ere they set sail for Pleasant Cove again, and the Corner House girls became quite used to the methods of the fishermen and the tactics of the swordfish on being struck.

They sailed back to Pleasant Cove with what was called the prize catch of the season. When

a fish is as big as a good-sized dining-table and sells for twenty-five cents a pound, retail, it does not take many to make a good catch.

Ruth and Agnes, and Neale and the other boys, were glad they went on the trip. They arrived at the camp late in the evening, filled with enthusiasm over the adventures of the day.

And Skipper Joline presented the Corner House girls with a four-foot sword which, later, occupied a place of honor over the sitting-room mantelpiece in the old Corner House at Milton.

Ruth took Tom Jonah up to see the Wildwood girls with her the very next time she went to call.

The Corner House girl found Rosa and June shelling peas under the arbor, while Mrs. Bobster was talking with Kuk Somes over a "mess" of clams she had bought.

"You ain't honest enough to count out a hunderd clams, Kuk," declared the plain-spoken old lady. "Ye got such a high-powered imagination that ye can't count straight."

"Now, Mis' Bobster, thet thar's a hard statement ter make," said Kuk, shaking his head, but grinning. "Don't make me out so 'fore these here young ladies."

"I reckon they know ye!" cried the widow. "If they've ever hearn ye spin one o' yer sea-farin' yarns——"

"And we have," interposed Ruth, smiling. "He's told us about how he sailed in the *Spanking Sal* and lost his leg fighting pirates."

"For the good land o' liberty!" gasped Mrs. Bobster. "He never told ye *that?*"

"Oh, yes. It was very interesting," laughed Ruth.

"Why," said the widow, angrily, "that fellow never sailed in a deep-water craft in his life. The only time he ever went out in a double-ender as fur as the swordfish banks, he was so sick they had ter bring him ashore on a stretcher!"

"Now, Mis' Bobster——" began the clam digger, faintly.

"Ain't that *so?* Ye daren't deny it," she declared. "He ain't no sailor. He's jest an old beach-comber. Don't never go in *any* boat outside of the cove. Lost his leg fightin' pirates, did he? Huh!"

"So he told us," said the much amused Ruth.

"Why, th' ridiculous old thing!" exclaimed Mrs. Bobster, laughing herself now. "He lost that leg in Mr. Reynolds' sawmill at Shawmit—that's how he did it. And he was tipsy at the time or he wouldn't never have got hurt."

"Oh!" cried Ruth, staring at the sheepish clam digger.

"And he goes over there to Shawmit ev'ry month an' collects ten dollars from Reynolds, who's good-natured and helps him out with a pension. Ain't that so, Kuk Somes?"

The wooden-legged clam digger nodded. "Whar's the harm?" he murmured. "Ye know

these city folks likes ter hear my yarns. An' it don't hurt 'em none."

"But that's how Mr. Reynolds heard about our having Tom Jonah," declared Ruth, accusingly. "You told him."

"Yep. That's his old dawg," said Kuk.

"Well, you've made us a lot of trouble," said Ruth, sadly. "For I am afraid that Mr. Reynolds will try to take Tom Jonah away. And," she added, in secret, "how wrong I was to accuse Trix Severn, without stronger evidence."

CHAPTER XXV

THE END OF THE OUTING

Tess and Dot Kenway had a very serious matter to decide. Ruth had determined that, as they were all enjoying themselves at Pleasant Cove so much, the Corner House flag should continue to wave for a time longer over their tent in the Willowbend Camp.

But there was something at home in Milton, at the old Corner House itself, that the younger girls thought they *must* attend to.

"It's really a *nawful* state of affairs," Tess declared, nodding her sunny head, gravely, and with her lips pursed up. "They are growing right up without knowing their own names. Why! I don't see how their own mother knows them apart."

"Oh!" gasped Dot, to whom this was a new idea indeed. "I never thought of that."

"Well, it's so," said Tess. "I—I wish Ruth had sent for them and had had them brought down here when Rosa and Tom Jonah came."

"But they couldn't leave their mother, Tess," objected Dot. "They're too small."

"I—don't—know," said Tess, doubtfully. "At any rate, it's high time they were named. You know, Mrs. MacCall says so herself."

Dot picked up the letter that the kind housekeeper at the old Corner House had written especially to the two smaller Kenway girls.

"She says they chase their tails all day long and they have had to put them out in the woodshed to keep them from being under foot," Dot said, reading slowly, for Mrs. MacCall's writing was not like print.

"They must be named," repeated Tess, with conviction.

"But Ruth won't let us go home to do it," quoth Dot.

"And I don't want to. Do *you?*" demanded Tess, hastily. "I don't want to leave the beach now, just when we're having so much fun."

Neither did Dot. But the state of the unchristened kittens—the youngest family of Sandyface—troubled her exceedingly.

Tess, however, suddenly had one of her very brilliant ideas. "I tell you what let's do!" she cried.

"What?"

"Let's write Mrs. MacCall and Uncle Rufus a letter, and ask them to name Sandyface's children their own selves."

"But—but *we* want to name them," cried Dot.

"Goosey!" exclaimed Tess. "We'll choose the names; but Mrs. MacCall and Uncle Rufus can give them to the kittens. Don't you see?"

"Oh, Tess! we might," agreed Dot, delighted.

Tess ran to the tent for paper and pencil, and

bespoke the favor of an envelope addressed in ink to Mrs. MacCall.

"Of course, I'll address one for you," said Ruth, kindly. "But what's all the hurry about writing home?"

Tess explained the necessity that had arisen. Sandyface's family of kittens was growing up without being christened—and something might happen to them.

"You know," said Tess, gravely, "it would be dreadful if one of them died and we didn't know what to put on the headboard. It would be dreadful!"

"And what names shall we send Mrs. MacCall?" Dot wanted to know, when Tess had started the letter "Deare Missus Mcall" and was chewing the pencil as an aid to further thought.

"Let's call them by seashore names," suggested Tess. "Then they'll remind us of the fun we had here at Pleasant Cove."

"Oh-oo! Let's," agreed Dot.

"Well, now," said Tess, promptly. "What will be the very first one? I'll write Mrs. MacCall what we want," and she proceeded to indite the following paragraph to begin the letter:

"We are having so much fun down here at plesent cove that we cant find time to come home and name Sandface's babbies. But we want you and unc rufs to do it for us and we are going to send you the names we chose. They are——"

Here Tess's laboring pencil came to a full stop. "Now, you got the first name, Dot?" she asked.

"I got two," declared Dot, confidently.

"What are they?" queried Tess. "Now, we want them to be real salt-water names. Just like fishes' names—or boats' names—or like that."

"I got two," declared Dot, soberly. "Lots of men must be named those names about here. I hear them hollerin' to each other when they are out in the boats."

"Well, well!" cried Tess, impatiently. "What are the names?"

"One's 'Starboard' and the other's 'Port,'" declared Dot, seriously. "And they are real nice names, *I* think."

Tess was rather taken aback. She had a hazy opinion that "Starboard" and "Port" were not Christian names; they *might* be, however, and she had heard them herself a good deal. Besides, she wanted to agree with Dot if she could, and so she sighed and wrote as follows:

"We got to names alreddy, Missus Meal, and one's Starborde and the other is Port. They are very pretty names, we think and we hope you an unc rufs and Sandface will like them, to. You give them to the kittens that they seem to fit the best, pleas."

Neale, and Ruth, and Agnes came along some time afterward and found the smaller Corner House girls reduced almost to a state of distrac-

tion. They had been unable to decide upon two more names. "Starboard" and "Port" had been inspired, it seemed. Now they were "stuck."

"It *does* seem as though there should be some other seashore names that would sound good for kittens," sighed Tess. "I think 'Starboard' and 'Port' are real pretty—don't you, Ruth?"

"Very fine," agreed her older sister, while Agnes restrained her giggles.

"Why not call one of the others 'Hard-a-Lee'?" suggested Neale, gravely.

"Is *that* a seashore name?" asked Tess, doubtfully.

"Just as salt as a dried codfish," declared Neale, confidently.

"I think it is real pretty," Dot ventured.

"Then we'll call the third one 'Hard-a-Lee,'" declared Tess. "I'll tell Mrs. MacCall so," and she laboriously went at the misspelled letter again.

"But how about the fourth one?" asked Agnes, laughing. "He's not going to be a step-child, is he? Isn't he to have a name?"

"Yes. We must have one more," Tess said, wearily. "Won't *you* give us one, Aggie?"

"Sure!" said Agnes, promptly. "'Mainsheet.'"

"'Starboard, Port, Hard-a-Lee and Mainsheet.' Some names, those!" declared Neale.

"I like them," Tess said, reflectively. "They don't sound like other cats' names—do they, Ruthie?"

"They most certainly do not," admitted the oldest Corner House girl.

"And are they pretty, Ruthie?" asked Dot.

"They are better than 'pretty,'" agreed Ruth, kindly. "If you children are suited, I am sure everybody else—including the kittens themselves—will be pleased!"

The labored letter was therefore finished and sent away. As Dot said, "it lifted a great load from their minds."

But there was another matter that served to trouble all four of the Corner House girls for some days. That was what Mr. Reynolds, the lumberman, was going to do about Tom Jonah.

The girls seldom left their tent now without taking the dog with them. He was something of a nuisance in the boat when they went crabbing; but Agnes would not hear of going out without him.

"I know that man will come back here some time and try to get him away," she declared. "But Tom Jonah will never go of his own free will—no, indeed!"

"And he won't sell him again, he said," sighed Ruth. "I don't just see what we can do."

However, this trouble did not keep the Corner House girls from having many good times with their girl friends at the Spoondrift bungalow, and their boy friends on the beach.

There were fishing trips, and picnics on Wild Goose Island. They sometimes went outside the cove in bigger boats, and fished on the "banks,"

miles and miles off shore. There was fun in the evenings, too, at the hotel dances, although the Corner House girls did not attend any of those held at the Overlook House, for they were not exactly friendly with Trix Severn.

One day Pearl Harrod's Uncle Phil arranged to take a big party of the older girls to Shawmit, which was some miles up the river. Ruth and Agnes went along and that day they left Tom Jonah at Willowbend to take care of the smaller girls.

Ruth determined to see Mr. Reynolds, so when they reached Shawmit, she hunted up the lumberman's office. She found him in a more amiable mood than he had been on the morning he drove to Pleasant Cove to get Tom Jonah.

"Well, Miss!" he said. "How do you feel about giving up that dog?"

"Just the same, sir," said Ruth, honestly. "But I hope you will tell me who the man is you sold Tom Jonah to, so that we can go to him and buy the dog."

"Do you girls really want old Tom Jonah as much as *that?*" asked Mr. Reynolds.

"Yes, sir," said the girl, simply.

"Willing to buy the old rascal? And he's nothing but a tramp."

"He's a gentleman. You said so yourself on his collar," said Ruth.

The man looked at her seriously and nodded. "I guess you think a whole lot of him, eh?"

"A great deal, sir," admitted Ruth.

"Well! I guess I'll have to tell you," said the man, smiling. "Old Tom evidently thinks more of you girls than he does of me. Tell you what: After I got home the other day I thought it over. I reckon Tom Jonah's chosen for himself. I paid my brother-in-law back the money he gave me for him. So you won't be bothered again about him."

"Oh, sir——"

"You keep him. Rather, let Tom Jonah stay as long as he wants to. But if he comes back to me I sha'n't let him go again. No! I don't want money for him. I guess the old dog likes it where he is, and his days of usefulness are pretty nearly over anyway. I'm convinced he'll have a good home with you Corner House girls."

"Just as long as he lives!" declared Ruth, fervently.

So Mr. Reynolds did not prove to be a hard-hearted man, after all. Agnes and Tess and Dot were delighted. There was a regular celebration over Tom Jonah that evening after Ruth got home and told the news.

It is doubtful if Tom Jonah understood when Dot informed him that he was going to be their dog "for keeps." But he barked very intelligently and the two smaller girls were quite convinced that he understood every word that was said to him.

"Of course, he can't talk back," Tess said. "Dogs don't speak our language. But if we could

understand the *barking language,* I am sure we would hear him say he was glad."

And as our story of the Corner House girls' visit to Pleasant Cove began with Tom Jonah, we may safely end it with the assurance that the good old dog will spend the rest of his life with Ruth and Agnes and Tess and Dot, at the old Corner House in Milton.

THE END

Charming Stories for Girls

From eight to twelve years of age.

THE CORNER HOUSE GIRLS SERIES

By Grace Brooks Hill

Cloth. *Large 12 mo.* *Illustrated.*

Price per volume 50 cents, net.

Four girls from seven to fifteen years of age receive word that a rich bachelor uncle had died leaving them the old Corner House he had occupied. They move into it and then the fun begins. What they found and what they did will provoke many a laugh.

Later they enter school and make many friends. One of these invites the girls to spend a few weeks at a bungalow owned by her parents and the adventures they meet with make very interesting reading.

Clean, wholesome stories containing an admixture of humor and adventure sure to appeal to all young girls.

THE CORNER HOUSE GIRLS

THE CORNER HOUSE GIRLS AT SCHOOL

THE CORNER HOUSE GIRLS UNDER CANVAS

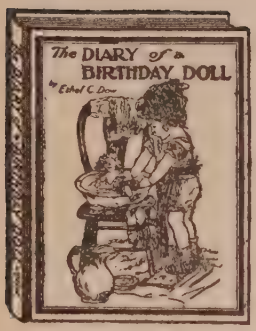
For sale at all book stores.

BARSE & HOPKINS

PUBLISHERS 526 W. 26TH ST. NEW YORK

THE DIARY OF A BIRTHDAY DOLL

By Ethel C. Dow



Every young girl loves to have a doll—and what girl does not like a good doll story? Intensely interesting is this tale of a wonderful, blue-eyed doll who lives, acts, speaks and does ever so many queer things which little girls will have them do. It recites the daily happenings for a period of six days—from Monday to Saturday—a chapter being devoted to the events of each day. A book of exceptional merit and one every young girl should read.

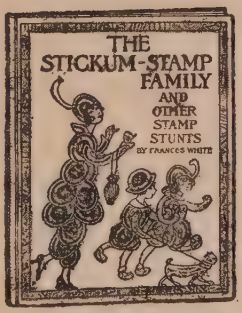
Cloth, Size 7 x 9¼ inches. Six full page colored illustrations
Price per volume 75c.

For sale at all bookstores
or sent (postage paid) upon receipt of price by the publishers.

BARSE & HOPKINS

Publishers 526 West 26th Street New York City

THE STICKUM STAMP FAMILY AND OTHER STAMP STUNTS



By
Frances White

A novel idea in juvenile literature. It is similar in construction to a paint book, but gives the children an opportunity to exercise their ingenuity in cutting up stamps and pasting them on drawings so as to produce the most artistic picture. It is sure to prove of uncommon interest to the young folks and makes an ideal gift book.

Illustrated with four full page color illustrations and twenty-two outline pen drawings. Printed on first quality paper and bound in boards with colored cover picture and colored wrapper to match.

Size 7 x 9¼ inches Per vol., 60c.

For sale at all book stores, or sent (postage paid) on receipt of price, by the publishers

BARSE & HOPKINS

PUBLISHERS 526 WEST 26th STREET NEW YORK

FIVE FAMOUS JUVENILE BOOKS

By Mary Dickerson Donohey.

A child's delight is a good fairy tale. Here we have stories of princesses and fairies which appeal to the imagination of children and at the same time teach them a good wholesome moral very easy to understand. The most delightful and instructive stories ever written for children. Each book profusely illustrated with pen drawings and full page color plates.

THE ADVENTURES OF A HAPPY DOLLY

128 pages, 5 full page colored illustrations.
Size 7¾ x 10¼ inches. Per vol., 75c.

THE MAGICAL HOUSE OF ZUR

128 pages, 6 full page colored illustrations.
Size 7¾ x 10¼ inches. Per vol., 75c.

DOWN SPIDER WEB LANE

130 pages, six full page colored illustrations.
Size 7¾ x 10¼ inches. Per vol., 75c.

THE CASTLE OF GRUMPY GROUCH

151 pages, 8 full page colored illustrations.
Size 7¾ x 10¼ inches. Per vol., 75c.

THROUGH THE LITTLE GREEN DOOR

178 pages, 3 full page colored illustrations.
Size 5⅜ x 7½ inches. Per vol., 75c.

For sale at all book stores, or sent (postage paid) on receipt of price, by the publishers

BARSE & HOPKINS

PUBLISHERS 526 WEST 26th STREET NEW YORK

GAMES FOR ALL OCCASIONS

By MARY E. BLAIN

A most complete book of games for young and old—games for tiny tots—games for children and games for adults. Also games for special occasions such as

HALLOWE'EN	ST. VALENTINE'S DAY
CHRISTMAS	LINCOLN'S BIRTHDAY
EASTER	FOURTH OF JULY
MAY DAY	NEW YEAR'S DAY

WASHINGTON'S BIRTHDAY, ETC.

A great many new and novel suggestions are given as to how to decorate the house and what to serve on these special occasions.

Cloth binding, size 5¼ in. x 7¾ in., net 60c.

For sale at all book stores, or sent (postage paid) on receipt of price, by the publishers

BARSE & HOPKINS

526 WEST 26th STREET :: :: :: :: NEW YORK